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## Weekly Parsha

# Vayigash

RABBI BERNIE FOX

### Yosef Asks if His Father Is Still Alive

And Yosef said to his brothers, "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" And they could not respond to him for they were confused. (Beresheit 45:3)

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## Weekly Parsha

# JOSEPH & HIS BROTHERS

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

*Transcribed by students*

**I**N ANALYZING  
**JOSEPH'S**  
**RELATIONSHIP**  
**WITH HIS BROTH-**  
**ERS WE MUST ASK**  
**SEVERAL SALIENT**  
**QUESTIONS WHICH**  
**WILL SHED LIGHT**  
**ON THE SEQUENCE**  
**OF EVENTS RE-**  
**CITED IN THE TORAH.**

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(Vayigash cont. from pg. 1)

## Weekly Parsha

# JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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At the end of Parshat Meketz, Yosef hid his goblet among Binyamin's possessions. He then sent his officers to capture Binyamin and accuse him of theft. Yosef's officers carried out their master's orders. They brought the brothers before Yosef. Yosef told the brothers that they may return to their father. However, Binyamin will be punished for his crime. He will be placed in bondage in Egypt.

In our parasha Yehudah appeals to Yosef for Binyamin's release. He offers to take Binyamin's place. He volunteers to serve as a slave in place of Binyamin. Yehudah completes his appeal. Yosef is overcome with intense emotion. He reveals himself to his brothers. He then asks, "Is my father still alive?" This question is difficult to understand. Surely, Yosef knew the answer. Yehudah had just appealed to Yosef on behalf of Binyamin. In his appeal, he described the deep love between Yaakov and Binyamin. He told Yosef of the unbearable anguish Yaakov would experience if he were separated from his youngest son. It was clear that from this petition that Yaakov was alive. Yehudah was asking Yosef to act with compassion for Yaakov. Why does Yosef now ask, "Is my father still alive?"?

Klee Yakar offers a number of responses to this question. In his first response, he explains that Yosef had listened to Yehudah's appeal. Yet, he remained uncertain whether his father was alive. He reasoned that because Yehudah was attempting to save Binyamin, he may have been dishonest. Perhaps, his description of the love between Yaakov and Binyamin was an invention designed to appeal to Yosef's compassion. In order to save Binyamin, Yehudah may have lied about Yaakov.

After Yosef revealed himself, he again asked whether his father was alive. He assumed that the brothers realized that Binyamin was not in danger. They understood that Yosef would not harm his younger brother. He expected that his brothers would now have no reason to deceive him and their response to his renewed inquiry would be completely true.

Klee Yakar offers a second explanation of Yosef's question based upon the comments of the Talmud. The Talmud's comments are based upon the brothers' response to Yosef. The Torah tells us that they were confused. The brothers' confusion can reasonably be explained as a response to the discovery that the minister of Egypt to whom they were appealing was their brother Yosef. However, the

Talmud suggests an alternative explanation of their reaction. The Talmud suggests that they detected a rebuke in Yosef's question. According to this explanation, their response can be better characterized as shock.

Where was the rebuke in Yosef's question? Klee Yakar explains that the rebuke is implied by Yosef's choice of words. Yosef described Yaakov as his father. He did not ask, "Is our father alive?" The brothers sensed that this choice of words reflected a rebuke. Yosef was accusing them of not feeling sympathy for their father. They had allowed Yaakov to suffer the loss of a beloved son. They had not treated Yaakov as their father. They concluded that Yosef was claiming that only he was faithful to Yaakov. He was the only brother that had conducted himself as a true son.[1]

It seems that there is a second rebuke in Yosef's words, "I am Yosef." The brothers had judged Yosef to be corrupt beyond salvation. But had they been correct that Hashem would have assisted them in their plans to eliminate their evil and dangerous brother. However, Hashem had ruled against the brothers' stand. He had protected Yosef, and even led him to prosper and become the ruler of Egypt. Yosef pointed out the extent of their misjudgment of him with the simple but penetrating remark, "I am your brother Yosef, whom you sold to the Egyptians!" Confronted with this twofold rebuke the brothers were completely stunned and could not respond.



Geshonides' approach to explaining Yosef's question is similar to Klee Yakar's first explanation. Yosef was unsure whether his brother's previous assertions that Yaakov was alive were truthful. However, Geshonides suggests a different cause for Yosef's suspicions. 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 did this response have to the accusation? Second,

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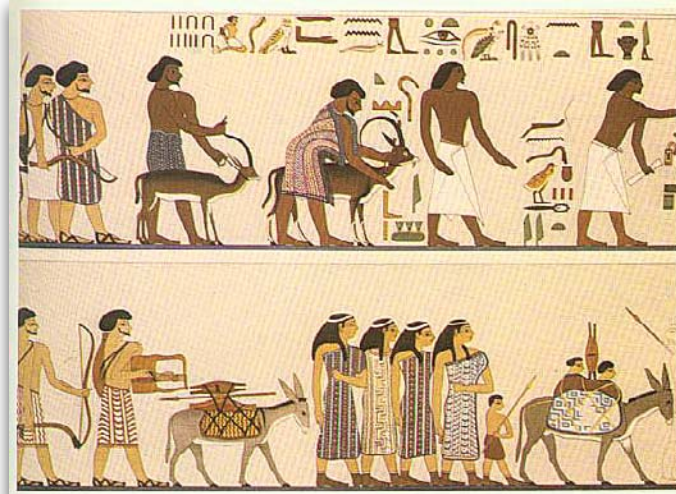
Yosef rejected their response. He claimed that their reply supported his accusation. How did the brother's description of their family support Yosef's charge? Third, Yosef demanded that the brothers clear themselves of suspicion by bringing their youngest brother to Egypt. How would bringing Binyamin to Egypt prove the brothers' innocence?

Gershonides offers a comprehensive response to these questions. Yosef accused the brothers of spying. The brothers responded that they shared a single father. Gershonides explains this response. Their account of their family was an attempt to persuade Yosef that they were not really spies. Spying is dangerous. A father might allow one of his children to engage in such an endeavor. Perhaps, in a desperate situation, he would allow a few of his children to engage in such a perilous mission. However, a father would not risk the lives of all of his children. The brothers argued that, on this basis, they could not be spies. They were 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 bring back more food 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! 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.[2]

Based on Gershonides' explanation of the dialogue between Yosef and his brothers, Gershonides explains 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. By allowing all of his sons to travel to Egypt, their father 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.



### Exile in Egypt Contributed to Creating the Nation of Israel

*And He said: I am the Hashem, the G-d of your father. Do not fear descending to Egypt. For there I will make you into a great nation. (Beresheit 46:3)*

Hashem appears to Yaakov and tells him that it is His will that Yaakov and his family descend to Egypt. There, in a foreign land, the nation of Israel will be created. The pasuk implies that the experience of Yaakov's descendants in Egypt was essential to the creation of the nation. This goal could not be achieved in the land of Canaan. Why was exile crucial to the creation of the Jewish people?

Sfomo explains that it was impossible for the Yaakov's descendants to fully integrate into Egyptian society. Custom created 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 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.

### Yosef's Test of His Brothers

*And Yosef could not bear all those standing in his presence. And he called out, "Take everyone away from me!" And no one stood with him when Yosef made himself known to his brothers. (Beresheit 45:1)*

In the previous parasha, Yosef is reunited with his brothers. Yosef is Paroh's prime minister and rules over Egypt. He recognizes his brothers but they do not recognize him. At the close of the parasha, Yosef instructs the head of his household to surreptitiously place his goblet in Binyamin's bags. Then, Yosef sends this servant in pursuit of the brothers. The servant and his company overtake the brothers and uncover the hidden goblet. They accuse Binyamin of stealing the goblet. The brothers are returned to Yosef. Yosef tells the brothers that they will be released to return home. But Binyamin will be kept in bondage in Egypt.

Our parasha opens with an appeal by Yehudah to Yosef. His appeal is composed of three components. First, he elaborately describes the agony that their father, Yaakov, will experience if he is separated from Binyamin. He tells Yosef that this separation will kill their father. Second, he explains that from among all of the brothers, he has accepted upon himself primary responsibility for the safe return of Binyamin to his father. If he fails to return Binyamin, he will have irrevocably violated his pledge. Third, Yehudah offers to take Binyamin's place in bondage. He asks that Yosef allow Binyamin to return to Canaan with his brothers and he will remain in bondage in Egypt.

Our passage introduces Yosef's reply. The passage relates that Yosef could not bear the situation. However, the exact translation of the passage is widely disputed. The dispute revolves around the precise cause of Yosef's discomfort and anxiety. The above translation corresponds with

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Rashi's interpretation of the passage. According to Rashi, Yosef had reached the moment at which he would reveal himself to his brothers. He knew that his revelation would summon up for his brothers a recounting of his treatment by them. He knew his brothers would experience intense shame. He did not want the Egyptians of his household to witness this episode.[4]

Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra offers a similar explanation. His explanation is also consistent with the above translation. According to Ibn Ezra, Yosef was so moved by Yehudah's appeal that he could not wait any longer to reveal himself to his brothers. This created a dilemma. Yosef was the prime minister of Egypt. He conducted the business of the kingdom. He was not alone with his brothers. Other people who had business to conduct with him were present. Yosef had intended to allow all those present to complete their dealings with him and depart. Once he and his brothers were alone, he would reveal himself. However, he could no longer delay his reunion with his brothers. Yosef departed from his original plan to allow all those present to complete their dealings and depart. Instead, he ordered everyone to be removed from his and his brothers' presence.[5]

Nachmanides offers a very different explanation of the passage. According to Nachmanides, Yehudah's appeal was so moving that he had even won the support of Yosef's household. Yosef was confronted with a unified and all-inclusive opposition. In the face of this opposition, he could no longer promote his threat to imprison Binyamin. He recognized that in order to retain the respect of his own household, he must bring this confrontation to an immediate conclusion. According to this explanation, the passage must be translated somewhat differently than above. According to Nachmanides, the proper translation is that "Yosef could no longer withstand all those in his presence." [6]

Midrash Rabbah explains that Yosef realized that Yehudah was quickly coming to the conclusion that his appeal had failed. But Yehudah was not willing to abandon his pledge to return Binyamin to his father. Yehudah would have no alternative but to resort to violence. He would soon conclude that he must attempt to physically regain control of Binyamin. Yosef was not willing to allow a physical confrontation to take place. In order to avert this confrontation, he revealed himself to his brothers.[7] This explanation also requires an alternative translation of the text.

Rashi's and Ibn Ezra's approaches share two common elements. First, the first and second portions of the passage are related. Yosef's

command to remove all those present is directly related to the source of his anxiety. According to Rashi, Yosef could not bear for the Egyptians to witness the embarrassment of his brothers. Therefore, he commanded for all those present to be removed. Also, according to Ibn Ezra, this connection is preserved. Yosef intended to reveal himself to his brothers privately – without anyone else present. He could not wait for those present to complete their business. He commanded that they be removed immediately.

Second, according to Rashi and Ibn Ezra, Yosef's strategy essentially unfolded as he had planned. According to Rashi, Yosef revealed himself to his brothers at precisely the moment he anticipated. According to Ibn Ezra, Yosef had hoped to avoid any unwelcome witnesses. He was unable to achieve this objective. Certainly, his sudden command that everyone remove themselves from his presence attracted attention. But all the prerequisites that Yosef had planned were in place. He expected nothing else from his brothers. He was merely waiting for the appropriate, confidential moment to reveal himself.

Nachmanides and Midrash Rabbah disagree with Rashi and Ibn Ezra on both of these issues. First, according to Nachmanides and Midrash Rabbah,

the first and second portions of the passage are not related. Yosef's instruction to remove all those present is not directly related to the source of his anxiety. According to Nachmanides, Yosef was forced to act before he lost the respect of his own household. This does not explain his instruction to remove all those present. According to Midrash Rabbah, Yosef feared that Yehudah would soon resort to violence. This concern does not explain his insistence on being alone with his brothers.

Nachmanides addresses this issue. He explains that Yosef's insistence on being alone with his brothers was not motivated by his anxiety. Instead, he was responding to a different concern. He did not want the Egyptians to discover that his brothers had sold him into slavery and that they had caused their father terrible anguish. Yosef was prepared to appeal to Paroh to allow his father, brothers, and their families to resettle in Egypt. Paroh would need assurance that he could rely on the loyalty of these immigrants. Yosef did not want Paroh to discover that his siblings had sold their own brother into slavery and had mercilessly tormented their own father. If Paroh discovered that Yosef's brothers acted with callousness and disloyalty to their own family members, he would not trust that their loyalty to him.[8]

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Second, according to Nachmanides and Midrash Rabbah, Yosef's strategy did not unfold exactly as planned. According to Nachmanides and Midrash Rabbah, there is no indication that Yosef was prepared to reveal himself at the moment he did. He was forced to act sooner than he planned – either to protect his own image or to avert violence. If this is correct, an obvious question arises. What else did Yosef seek from his brothers?

In order to answer this question, we must return to Yehudah's appeal. This appeal is essentially composed of two themes. First, Yehudah carefully describes the suffering his father will experience at the loss of Binyamin. Second, Yehudah accepts upon himself personal responsibility for Binyamin's return.

These two themes correspond with Yehudah and his brothers' previous failings. First, in selling Yosef they acted with disregard to their father and his well being. Second, Yehudah was the brother who suggested selling Yosef into bondage rather than killing him. Yehudah had argued that Yosef was their flesh and blood. They should not kill him. However, Yehudah stopped short of confronting his brothers and rescuing Yosef. Instead, he suggested a compromise: selling Yosef into bondage. This suggests that Yehudah was not fully prepared to defend and fight for his values. In order to avoid a confrontation with his brothers, he sought a compromise between his values and their desire to rid themselves of Yosef.

Now, Yehudah speaks to Yosef and describes in detail the suffering his father will experience if he loses Binyamin. Yehudah has repented from the insensitivity he had demonstrated to his father in the past. He also accepts responsibility for Binyamin and is prepared to sacrifice himself in order to save his brother.

Perhaps, according to Rashi and Ibn Ezra, Yosef's fundamental objective was to force Yehudah and his brothers to recognize that they had betrayed their father. Yehudah's appeal eloquently spoke to this issue. Therefore, once Yehudah made his appeal, Yosef was prepared to reveal himself.

However, if Yosef wished to force Yehudah to demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice himself for his values, the drama was not yet over. Yehudah had offered to enter into bondage in order to save Binyamin, but his sincerity had not been fully tested. Was Yehudah's offer sincere or was he hoping that Yosef would recognize his determination to save Binyamin and therefore allow all of the brothers to return to Canaan? One more scene was required to test Yehudah's sincerity. Would Yehudah allow himself to be placed in shackles or

would he attempt to retract his offer at the last moment? Perhaps, according to Nachmanides and Midrash Rabbah, Yosef wished to execute this last test. ■

[1] Rav Shlomo Ephraim Luntshitz, Commentary Klee Yakar on Sefer Bereshiet 45:3.

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

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

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

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

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

[7] Midrash Rabba, Sefer Beresheit 93:8.

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

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# JOSEPH

## & HIS BROTHERS

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by students



**W**e 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,

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the Medrash tells us that when they entered Egypt they looked for Joseph in the houses of ill repute. They never imagined nor appreciated Joseph's true intellectual conviction and ability to elevate himself to a higher level. This essentially was their "chate", sin. They misjudged his abilities and failed to realize that he was still a child at the time they passed judgment, and capable of change. Therefore, this image was still in their mind and prevented them from ever imagining that Joseph was the Viceroy.

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

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

Joseph foresaw that his brothers would be coerced to come to Egypt to buy provisions because of the famine. As a result, he viewed the situation as the opportune time to allow his brothers to repent. He was hoping that they would search for him and rectify the situation. Upon their first meeting with Joseph he acted as a stranger to them. The Torah tells us that Joseph remembered the

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

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

Upon being presented with these circumstances the brothers stated that this sad state of events had befallen them because of their unjust actions against

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Joseph. Joseph heard their misgivings and turned from them and cried. Rashi comments that he cried because he heard that they had "charatta", they regretted their actions. It was not a mere emotional response. He cried because he realized that one of the components of teshuva was present. They had regrets over their past actions. The Torah specifically tells us that they were upset because they did not have mercy upon their brother (Joseph) when he cried to them. They were callous to his pleas for sympathy. However, he could not reveal himself as yet, because he wanted to ensure that they would be completely forgiven and elevate themselves to a higher level of conduct. This could only be done after his entire plan had unfolded.

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

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

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

always felt and prevented him from indulging in wine. This day, with his brothers present, he allowed himself to partake.

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

The brothers responded by ripping their garments and acknowledging that G-d was punishing them for their sin of selling Joseph. Thereby, Judah made an appeal on behalf of his brothers for Benjamin's freedom. He acknowledged their guilt by selling Joseph and offered himself as a slave in Benjamin's stead. Judah's

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

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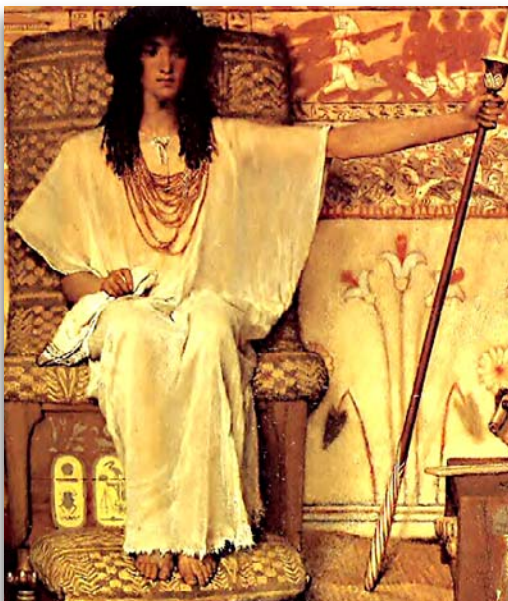
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# Divine Dreams

## 2 Amazing Lessons

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



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

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

When he was 17, Joseph dreamt of 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.

*(continued on next page)*



### 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 re-channelled 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 Avraham, 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?

### 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 Divine Signs: Dreamer & Duplication

God's dreams granted to Joseph contained content, but they were also "instructional". 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. 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 his original two Divine dreams, Joseph would not have pondered dreams. He would not necessarily have studied

(continued on next page)



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.

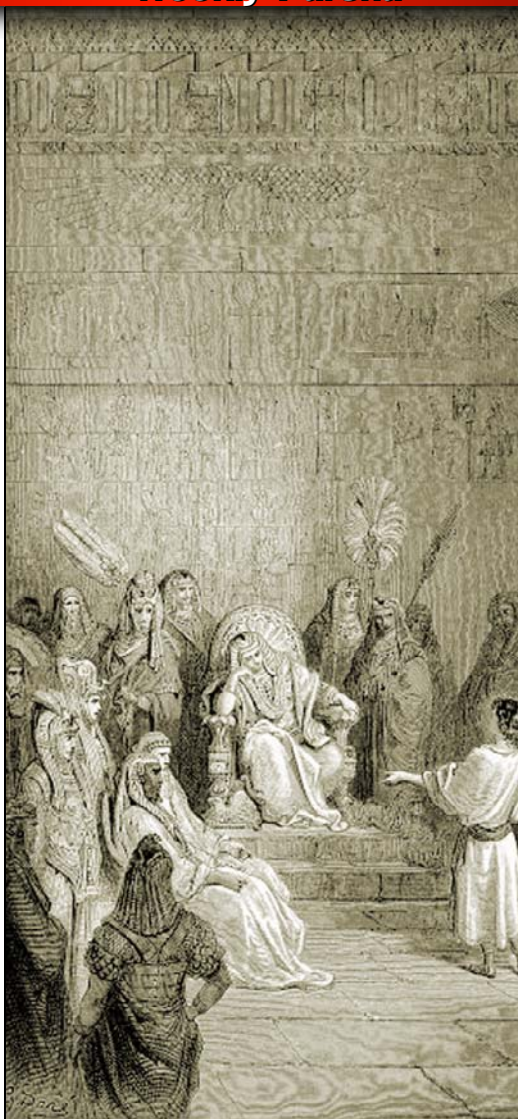
God, with a single brush stroke of Joseph's dreams, 1) placed Joseph in prison to humble him; 2) He caused the brothers to repent, this time not abandoning their youngest brother; 3) He caused Jacob to perfect his excessive love; and 4) He trained Joseph in the art of dream interpretation...the science 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 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's Bailout



Jonathan Herman

At the end of Vayigash the Torah relates to us the interactions between Joseph and the people of Egypt. The people did not have any food stored up and had run out of money. The Torah tells us (Genesis 47:15), "And the money from the Land of Egypt and the Land of Canaan was used up and the people of Egypt came to Joseph saying, 'give us bread and why should we die opposite you because there is no money'". The Ramban states that the Egyptians brought to Joseph's attention the fact that Canaan was also out of money. They said to him we and Canaan are out of money so no one will be coming to you to buy grain. Why should we die for no reason and all the grain will remain in your hands with no buyers. In verse 16 Joseph tells them, "bring your cattle and I will give you [grain] for your cattle if there is no money". The question arises, if the Egyptians had cattle why wouldn't they offer that to Joseph in place of the money? Money is a medium of exchange and movable assets can easily function in that capacity. Cattle may be a lot more inefficient than say gold and silver coins but when you are facing starvation you will barter with anything you have.

The famine was only in its first year and the Egyptians were already feeling its ravaging effects. Going from living it up one year to dying of starvation the next must have caused mass hysteria. They came to Joseph in a panic and asked for – a bailout. It would seem that they had not followed Joseph's warnings properly by saving during the 7 good years. Chazal say the grain rotted for those that did save. Perhaps they felt the good years would never stop and the famine was blown out of proportion so they did not store their grain properly and it went bad. People cannot fathom that bad times are coming when there is great prosperity around them. Of course, Pharaoh, with Joseph in charge, kept to a strict plan of saving and was careful in storing his grain. Joseph's response was if you don't have money then sell your cattle for bread. He did not give in to the demands of the people. Why would he request their cattle and not hand out grain for

free? Doesn't this show him to be a man of no compassion? After all, he had control of vast amounts of grain and the people had nothing. Surely he could afford to help his people.

Joseph knew that if he simply gave out bread for nothing the people would keep coming back for more. They would come to rely on his generosity and would not attempt to work the fields and become productive again. He saw the people reverting to a childish state of dependence where they were trying to gain security in him. Simply put, he would have created a welfare state. Joseph immediately instructed the people to bring their cattle in order to pay for the grain in order to keep their sense of independence. In the second year we see the people again come to Joseph for grain. They state that they have used up their money and cattle. However, this time they say (47:18), "there is nothing remaining before our master except our bodies and our land". In verse 19 the people continue, "buy our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants to Pharaoh, and give us seeds so that we shall live and not die and the land will not become desolate". The attitude of the people had changed. In verse 15 they said "why should we die" but here they said "and give us seed so that we shall live and not die". Joseph showed them the importance of having economic independence. When the people first came to him they were frightened and perhaps depressed. All they could think about was their impending deaths. Now they are talking about living and working the fields. They were not looking for handouts. They now wanted to be involved in an economic transaction of their own free will. They are even willing to sell their most cherished assets to BUY food and seeds to work the land. Joseph's compassion is clear. By not giving out free food he enabled the people to psychologically recover from the effects of the famine and not sink deeper into a state of dependence. The people failed to prepare properly for the predicted famine but Joseph would not bail them out economically. He did, however, bail them out from their state of dependence. ■



## Letters



# Letters

*from our*

## READERS



### 70 Faces

**Reader:** Doesn't it say that there are seventy ways of looking at the Torah and all of them are correct?

**Mesora:** First of all, "70" isn't literal: it means there are "multiple" facets to Torah. On any single verse for example, one may derive many truths.

From the myriad of arguments found in the Talmud and Torah commentators, we learn that the Rabbis did not understand this saying to mean all explanations are correct. They did not suggest their colleague was correct, since "There are 70 facets to the Torah". This saying means that there is a great amount of knowledge to be derived. But we must discern what we hear and learn to ascertain what makes sense, and what does not.

As God's Torah reveals His infinite knowledge, a single verse will hold numerous ideas. And all ideas intended by that verse must not contradict each other, or any truth.

I would add that many people today tend to use this saying to defend any view stated by a person

or a Rabbi. But the fact is that in the "name of Torah", we have heard many incorrect and even dangerous notions...even from Rabbis.

There is much to learn. But what we accept as truth must make sense and conform to Torah fundamentals. ■

### Divine Protection

**Reader:** I had a question regarding hashgacha...

In Parshat Vayeshev, (39:21, 23), the Torah says that "Hashem was with Joseph." However, according to the Rambam, hashgacha (divine providence) occurs via the Divine overflow to a person who has a superior intellect/knowledge of Hashem, where "he is with God and God is with him" (Guide, III, 51).

My question: at this point in the parsha, there is no indication that Joseph had attained the level of knowledge of Hashem that would trigger Divine overflow. In fact, in 40:14, Joseph asks the Cupbearer to "think of me...when he (Pharaoh) benefits you, and you will do me a kindness, if you please, and mention to Pharaoh, then you would get me out of this building." Clearly if he had attained the level of knowledge of his father, grandfather and great grandfather, he would have relied on Hashem to liberate him and not man.

If we use Rambam's understanding of hashgacha pratit, how did Joseph, who relied on man and not God, warrant providence?

**Mesora:** We do not know what 'level' of knowledge or providence Joseph attained. But we do know with certainty from the earliest moments of his entrance into Egypt that he did attain God's providence. Just as soon as he was purchased by Potiphar, the Torah says, "And God was with Joseph..." (Gen. 39:2) and later as well as seen in 39:21. And even prior to this, Rashi comments that Joseph was purchased by a caravan delivering pleasant-smelling goods so the Tzaddik Joseph would benefit. This implies providence.

Regardless of one's level of providence, the Torah does not support the idea of relying on God alone. "Ain somchin al hanase", "do not rely on miracles". When being approached by his wicked twin Esav who was about to attack him, Jacob did not rely on prayer alone: he also prepared for war and for a political maneuver. And even when Samuel was in direct conversation with God under His directive to anoint David, Samuel did not rely on God to save him from Saul. There is no better example than this which teaches that we are not to rely on miracles. ■

### Kabbala & Polytheism II

**Reader:** According to kabbalists the emanated Divine Attributes are not metaphorical. They are hypostases, i.e., they are regarded as objective, existing entities. Moreover, they are arranged in a number of Configurations. These emanations, in this view, are considered actual Divinity as can be seen from Ramchal quoted below.

This is in response to Jessie Fischbein's following fine points entitled "Kabbala & Polytheism" printed in the Letters section of the JewishTimes Dec. 26, 2008 issue:

"I do recall the idea of "sefirot" which is described as "emanations," and I recall for example, some were "netzach" (eternity), "hod" (glory), and one was "melech" (king). It is my opinion that these can be related to in a similar manner to the way we describe Hashem "having" attributes. If Hashem is One, then He has no attributes. And yet He is described as "rachum" (merciful), "erech apayim" (slow-to-anger), "keyl" (power), "shakai" (sufficient). I do not think that today's Jews worship the sefirot. It is my understanding that they regard Hashem as "ein-sof" (infinite and unknowable), and that the sefirot can be understood similar to the attributes."

Below is an exact extract from Tohar Hayichud [www.mesora.org/ToharHayichud.pdf](http://www.mesora.org/ToharHayichud.pdf) (pp. 69-73) which I feel address Jessie Fischbein's position:

"The outstanding latter-day apologist for kabbalism, Rabbi Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto (1707-47), wrestles with this problem in his "Philosopher and Kabbalist", a dialogue between a classic, orthodox Torah philosopher and a kabbalist, as follows:

Philosopher: If Atsiluth is Godhead, then how can you say that Godhead derives from Godhead? Is this view different from the view of the Christians, who propound the trinity, saying he is three and He is one? ... Thus far I have spoken only of Atsiluth. When we come to Beriah, Yetsirah and Asiyah, the objections and perplexities increase greatly. ... For you assume the derivation [from Atsiluth] of Beriah, Yetsirah and Asiyah, and you call them, too Godhead, and you make distinctions -- one part being called by this name, and another

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(Letters cont. from previous page)

## Letters

part not so called, and so on. Tell me, in the name of your faithful friendship, and by your life, whether an intelligent person can conceive of a distinct part of G-d, of a half, of a third, or of a tenth -- and direct his service sometime to this part and sometimes to another? ... It would indeed have been better to believe along with the entire congregation that the Cause of all causes is One in an absolute sense. ...

I have heard you kabbalists say that the Sefiroth evolve by degrees until this physical world emerges. This is an impossibility which I cannot accept -- namely, that Godhead, evolves and develops until the murky world of matter emerges. ... If you say that the Sefiroth are an emanated radiation of En Sof, I have already raised the objection at the beginning: How is it possible to cause the derivation and the emanation of Godhead from Godhead? Furthermore, if they are emanated from Him -- then they are outside of Him! And if you say even a hundred times: 'like the flame which is connected to the coal' -- these are only words said by the mouth, that do not pass through the ear. How much less do they enter the heart to be accepted concurrently that its essence is not Godhead, and yet, at the same time, Godhead. Certainly this is impossible and entirely inconceivable. Now I have heard that your service relates to the Sefiroth. I see no way to permit this, if they are not Godhead in essence. And if you answer that Godhead cleaves to them to such an extent that they are called by His name, what, then, will you say to the Christians, for you have no justification to answer them.

I am telling you what I have read and heard concerning these things that you explain as development [i.e., emanation]: how the created evolved from the Creator, as though the Creator were primal matter for the created, which evolves from Himself, and that matter continues to be acted upon gradually until it reaches the created themselves -- which are the Sefiroth; all that you kabbalists expound is along these lines. For you say that the Creator, blessed be His name, caused Himself to be acted upon until He became the radiance of Himself, which continues to be acted upon by evolving until there emerge the lower forms of existence. ... But I have already objected that it is impossible for His light to evolve. And you have already admitted this -- that no characteristic of corporeality applies to Him, blessed be He.

Kabbalist: I admit all this. Indeed it is the foundation of my entire structure that the Emanator possesses no characteristic of corporeality at all, G-d forbid; and it is impossible to say in any way that His light is acted upon and evolves so that the Creator becomes something created. For as long as I have lived I have never heard concerning creation anything else than that it was effected from nothing. Consequently, how can one speak of evolving and being acted upon? ... I will now start you on the road to understand what you have never understood.

Philosopher: Speak!

Kabbalist: Know that the Emanator is One who is possessed of will. Now understand; He and His will (emphasis added).

[Note: In his work *Milhemeth Moshe*, Rabbi M.H. Luzzatto makes this point more clearly: "That is to say, you must distinguish between 'Him' -- the Essence of G-d -- and His 'Will', that they are two [distinct] things (emphasis added) (page 8). Further: For example, when speaking about a man, the man is called the 'subject,' while what is said about him, his characteristics, are called the 'predicate,' or 'predicates.' Thus in speaking of a man, we can speak of a predicate of him: that he is a man of Torah, or a man of charity or that he is wise. All these are distinct predicates, so that we are able to speak of each predicate separately."]

Philosopher: I understand you to mean that we can speak of Him in two aspects: in the aspect of Himself, and in the aspect of His Will.

Kabbalist: Do you admit this or not?

Philosopher: Certainly. Every subject can be discussed in the aspect of each of his predicates separately.

Kabbalist: Know that of the Essence of the Emanator, exalted and blessed be He, we are not permitted to speak, and we have no need to enter into any discussion about Him, for it is enough for us to know of His existence. Beyond this we are not permitted to speak at all. But know that whatever we say is about his Will (emphasis added), for this is closer to us, and is permitted, since we are not touching upon His Essence, blessed be He, at all.

(from p. 17-18) Know that [His] Will they (i.e., the kabbalist) call 'haarah' (radiated

light), while En Sof they call 'simple light.' Therefore, in this way the forces of [His] Will and His attributes are called: lights.

Philosopher: If so, according to you, these names are figurative expressions; these things have no [objective] existence except [subjectively] in [our] mind.

Kabbalist: See how you err in understanding the beginning of my words. ... Know that whoever wants to understand the matter of Sefiroth must consider the human soul. The matters of the soul are not [subjective] in thought alone, but rather an actual [objective] force. True, it so subtle that is is not subject to our senses, but in any case is is a [real] force, and it is possible for a man to discern it without [treating it] figuratively. In the same way the supernal characteristics and forces of the Sefiroth which we mentioned are actual [objective] things. The existence of the Emanator, blessed and elevated be He [=En Sof] - is certain, and the existence of His Will is also certain and this is His radiated light. For radiated light is what a luminary radiates and sends forth. So too what the One and Only Master wills is called radiated light. ... The forces of this Will are called lights, as mentioned. But they are lights of actual [objective] existences, analogous to the objective soul [of man]. ...

Philosopher: In that case, your general point is that the Sefiroth are the forces of the supernal Will in its finite aspect, and through them all acts occur."

Thus Rabbi M.H. Luzzatto comes to terms with the perplexing problems posed by the concept of kabbalistic emanation by relating emanation not to G-d's Essence, but to His Will. Not G-d's Essence is emanated; His Will is emanated and evolves into the Sefiroth. But this emanated Will, which is not G-d's Essence, as Rabbi M.H. Luzzatto stresses, is, nevertheless not a mere figure of speech. It is an actual objective force, an objective entity. From the point of view of classic Judaism this inescapable dualism is a heterodox conception. For the classic doctrine is that He and His Will are identical. There can be no distinction between Him (i.e., His Essence) and His Will, nor between His essence and His knowledge, etc. As Rambam states in the Guide (1:53)

Therefore we, who truly believe in the Unity of G-d, declare, that as we do not

(continued on next page)



(Letters cont. from previous page)

## Letters

believe that some element is included in His essence by which He created the heavens, another by which He created the elements, and third by which He created the Intelligences, in the same way we reject the idea that His essence contains an element by which He has power, another element by which He has will, and a third by which He has knowledge of His creatures. On the contrary, He is a simple essence, without any additional element whatever.

Rambam expressed this also in his Mishneh Torah, Yesode Hatorah 2:10:

The Holy One, blessed be He, perceives His true essence, and knows it as it is in reality; for His knowledge is not like ours, separate from His essence; we and our knowledge are not identical, but the Creator with His knowledge and His life are one (i.e. identical) in every respect, in every way, and in every sense of the term unity; for, if He possessed life and knowledge as things separate from His essence, there would be several divine beings, G-d Himself, His life, and His knowledge, This is not the case; He is One in every respect, in every way, and in every sense of the term unity; consequently He is the One Who knows, that which is known, and also the knowledge itself; all these are One (i.e., identical) -- a concept which cannot be clearly described in words, perceived by the ear, or understood by the heart of man. (In the Guide 1:68 Rambam states that this is "a fundamental principle of our Torah."

What is true of His knowledge is equally true of His Will or His power, as is clear from the above-quoted passage from the Guide.

Also Guide 2:18:

All things owe their existence to His eternal and constant wisdom, but we are utterly ignorant of the ways and methods of that wisdom, since, according to our view [that G-d has no attributes], His Will is identical with His Wisdom, and all His attributes are one and the same thing namely, His Essence or Wisdom.

Guide 1:69:

According to either opinion, the series of successive purposes terminates, as has been shown, in G-d's Will or wisdom, which in our opinion (i.e., that G-d has no attributes) are His Essence, and not anything separate from Himself or different from His Essence.



Disputation at Barcelona

Consequently, G-d is the final purpose of everything. Again, it is the aim of everything to become, according to its faculties, similar to G-d in perfection; this is what is meant by "His Will," which is identical with His Essence."

Guide 3:13:

We also meet with this view in Scripture: "The L-rd hath made everything lamaanehu for its (or His) purpose (Prov. 16:4). It is possible that the pronoun in lamaanehu refers to the object (viz., "everything"); but it can also be considered as agreeing with the subject; in which case the meaning of the word is, for the sake of Himself, or His Will which is identical with His Self [or Essence].

See also the last of the Eight Chapters (Shmoneh Perakim) in which Rambam states that G-d's attributes such as His knowledge, power will and life, etc. are inseparable from His Essence, and that they are identical.

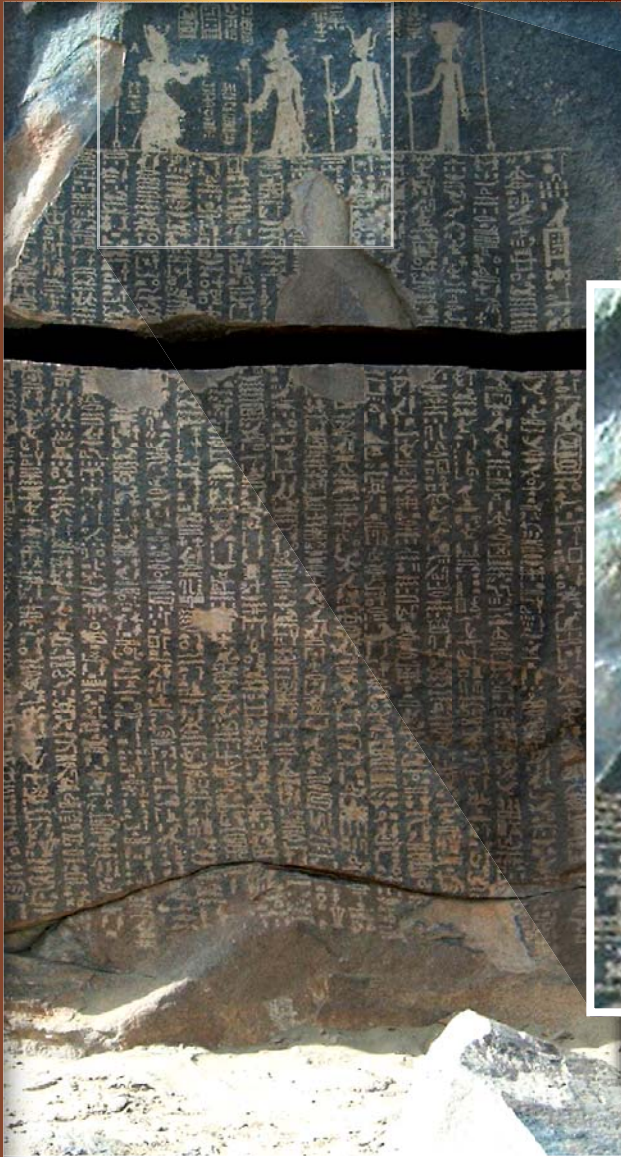
Ramban's Disputation:

I stood up and objected, "Hearken and hear my words, Jews and gentiles. Fray Paul asked me in Gerona if I believe in the trinity. I asked him, 'what is the trinity?' [Does it mean] that G-d is [composed of] three coarse (i.e., substantial) bodies like the bodies of men?' He answered, 'No' [I asked], [Are they three ethereal substances like souls or three angels?' He said 'No' [I inquired further]; Is it one thing composed of three [elements] as [physical] bodies consist of four elements? He said, 'No.' 'If so,' [I challenged], 'What is the trinity?' He answered, '[It is] the wisdom, will and power [of G-d],' I said. 'I admit that G-d is wise and not foolish (=negation), that He wills without emotion, and that He is powerful, and not weak (=negation). However, the expression trinity is a fundamental error. For wisdom, when said of the Creator, is not an accident (i.e., a quality that is not identical with the essence). Rather He and His Wisdom are One (i.e., identical), He and His Will are One (i.e., identical), He and His Power are One (i.e., identical). Consequently, the Wisdom, and the Will and the Power [of G-d] are all One (i.e., identical), [not three].

Thus, to escape the concept of an emanating, evolving essence of Godhead, Rabbi M.H. Luzzatto is forced into the equally heterodox concept of distinction between G-d's Essence and His Will; His Essence does not emanate and evolve, but His Will does exactly that -- not figuratively, but as an actual objective entity of Divine Will as a hypostasis.

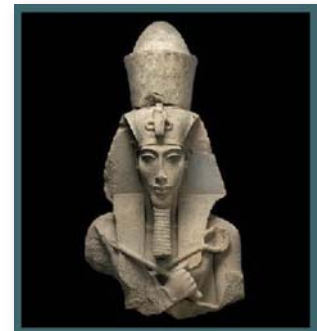
Thus, Rabbi M.H. Luzzatto is in basic contradiction to the Fundamental of the Kadmonim z"l (the Foremost Early Authorities) that G-d's Will (or His Wisdom, etc.), unlike that of man, is identical with G-d's Essence. The example given by Rabbi M.H. Luzzatto that "in speaking of a man, we can speak of ... [his] distinct predicates, ... of each predicate separately," is a shocking analogy that is not applicable to G-d with Whom all such predicates are identical with His Essence, as stressed over and over again by the Kadmonim z"l (The Foremost Early Authorities), as cited above numerous times. But Rabbi M.H. Luzzatto says of G-d: "He and His Will." "That is to say, you must distinguish between 'Him' -- the Essence of G-d -- and His 'Will,' that they are two things." To avoid the idea that G-d's Essence emanates and evolves, a concept that is unacceptable to Rabbi M.H. Luzzatto, he is forced to distinguish between G-d's Essence (which does not emanate) and His Will (which does emanate)." ■





Discovered on an Egyptian island, the Famine stele (*an upright inscribed stone*) depicts a devastating era in Egyptian history. Was this the famine of Joseph's days? The enlargement shows someone extending their arms towards another; perhaps in an act of offering food.

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