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IN THIS ISSUE

PARSHA: VAYIGASH	1-3
JOSEPH	5-8
LETTERS	9
WISDOM OF THE WRITING	10

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Weekly Parsha

Vayigash

RABBI BERNIE FOX

Yosef Reveals Himself to His Brothers

Yosef could not hold in his emotions. Since all his attendants were present, he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" Thus no one else was with him when Yosef revealed himself to his

(continued on next page)

JOSEPH



(Vayigash cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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brothers. (Bersheit 45:1)

Yosef has accused Binyamin of stealing. He has threatened to imprison Binyamin. As the parasha opens, Yehuda intervenes with Yosef on Binyamin's behalf. He offers to deliver himself to imprisonment in Binyamin's place. Yehudah completes his appeal. Yosef is overcome with intense emotion. He commands his servants and ministers to leave him. He is prepared to finally reveal himself to his brothers. Why did Yosef command his servants to leave? The Torah provides an ambiguous response. The pasuk seem to indicate two reasons. First, Yosef could no longer restrain his feeling. Second, he planned to reveal himself to his brothers. What is the connection between these two factors?

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

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

Nachmanides offers a very interested variation on these explanations. He also agrees that Yosef did not want the Egyptians present at the moment of his revelation. However, he offers an alternative explanation for this concern. Yosef planned to bring his father and brothers down to Egypt. His plan would require the

acquiescence of Paroh and the Egyptian people. He expected Egypt to open its borders to foreigners. This new group must be positively represented. Yosef needed to convince the Egyptians that they should not fear these foreigners. The Egyptians could not discover that Yosef's family had intrigued against him and showed disregard for their father's feelings. This knowledge would evoke suspicions. How could the Egyptians trust the loyalty of a family that sold one of its members into slavery? How could the brothers be expected to be faithful to Paroh? They had not been faithful to their own father! In order to avoid creating these suspicions, Yosef hid from the Egyptians the events leading to his bondage.[3]

Yosef's Reassurance to His Brothers

And now do not be grieved, and do not be angered that you have sold me to here. For it is as a source of sustenance that G-d has sent me before you. (Beresheit 45:5)

Yosef tells his brothers that he is their brother whom they sold into slavery in Egypt. He immediately assures his brothers that they need not fear him. Although they had plotted evil against him, he will not avenge this sin. Yosef explains



that his brothers' designs had not placed him in Egypt. It was Hashem who had arranged Yosef's exile. Providence had provided, through Yosef, salvation for the Children of Israel in this time of terrible famine. Yosef succeeds, through these assurances, in calming his brothers. They accept that his attitude of fraternal responsibility for their welfare is sincere. They return to Canaan to bring their families and father down to Egypt. They place their fates completely in the hands of their brother Yosef.

It is difficult to understand the impact that Yosef's assurances had on his brothers. Yosef, did not in any way, minimize the evil motives of his brothers or make mention of any repentance on their part. Yosef's entire interaction with his brothers, since their first appearance in Egypt, was designed to chastise them for misjudging him and for their callousness towards their father. Yet the brothers understood Yosef's words as containing a message of forgiveness or at least forbearance. Where was this message

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implied in his words?

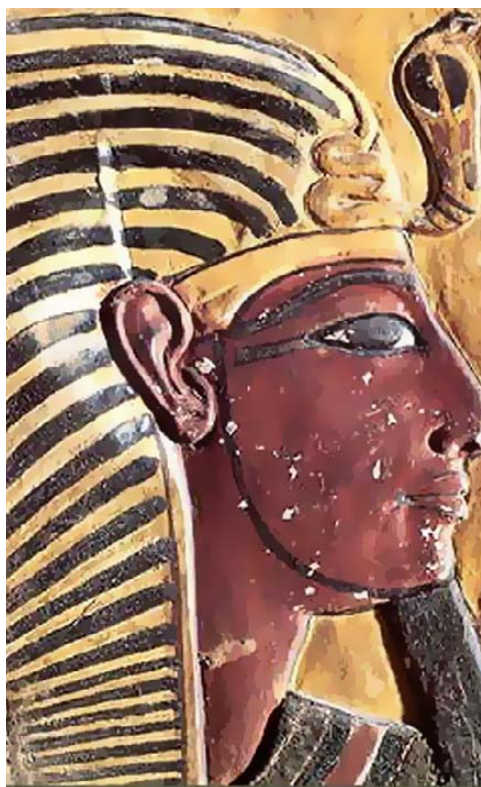
The Talmud comments that Yaakov and his children were destined to descend to Egypt. Rashi explains that this fate was decreed by Hashem in His covenant with Avraham.[4] He told Avraham that his descendants would endure four hundred years of exile and persecution before returning to the Land of Canaan and taking possession of it.[5] The Talmud asserts that had Yaakov not descended to Egypt to reunite with Yosef. He would have been brought into exile in iron chains.[6] The Talmud's message is that although the brothers believed that they were shaping their fate and the fate of Yosef when they sold him into slavery, they were actually only players in a drama directed by Hashem. They were participants in a divine strategy designed to fulfill the decree of exile and persecution that Hashem had revealed to Avraham.

Yosef's comments to his brothers reflect his recognition of the Talmud's basic message. He understood that his brothers' behaviors had not determined his fate. Instead, his fate was a consequence of a providential plan that neither he nor his brothers could alter. Vengeance is motivated by a desire to repay those who have harmed us. In order to desire vengeance, we must believe that an individual not only wished us evil, but actually succeeded in causing us harm. Yosef explained that he recognized that his brothers had conspired to subject him to bondage in a foreign land. However, he did not consider his experiences to be a result of their actions. Rather, the brothers were only participants in an intricate interplay directed by Hashem. He could not feel a desire for vengeance. His tribulations were the result of Hashem's design. The brothers realized that Yosef did not hold them responsible for his troubles, and this assurance convinced the brothers that Yosef would not harm them.

Yosef's Self-Imposed Separation from His Father

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

Yosef is finally to be reunited with his father, Yaakov. The pasuk tells us that he harnessed his chariot. Our Sages comment that although Yosef was a ruler in Egypt, he personally prepared his chariot. This was an indication of his deep respect for his father.[7] He greets



his father and is overcome by emotion. He falls upon Yaakov's shoulders and weeps. This reunion is not the first indication of Yosef's deep concern and love for Yaakov. He had repeatedly asked the brothers to report upon Yaakov's well-being. Yosef was a person of great authority in Egypt. He was second only to Paroh. It is clear that he had complete freedom of action. He loved his father. He certainly knew of the sorrow his father must have experienced in believing that his son was dead. It would seem Yosef could have easily contacted Yaakov earlier. Why did Yosef not communicate with Yaakov before this point?

Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam makes an enigmatic comment about this issue. He explains that Yosef recognized that Divine Providence was at work. He felt that revealing himself to his father would interfere with Hashem's plan.[8] The difficulty in Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam's explanation is that it is based upon a number of unstated premises. The explanation assumes that Yosef had some understanding of the nature of Hashem's plan. Based upon this understanding, Yosef concluded that he could not communicate to Yaakov. Any communication would undermine the ultimate objective. Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam leaves it to us to deduce Yosef's theory regarding Hashem's plan.

Perhaps we can understand Yosef's theory if we return to his dreams as a youth. In these dreams, Yosef discovered that some day he would become the leader of the brothers. Even his father would be under his authority. The brothers regarded these dreams as youthful fantasies. But Yosef never doubted the authenticity of his visions. Yosef realized that there were two possible paths to the fulfillment of his dreams. He could ascent to a position of authority over the brothers through their recognition of his leadership. This path was closed by the enmity that developed between Yosef and the brothers.

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

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

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

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

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

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on the Talmud, Mesechet Shabbat 89b.

[5] Sefer Beresheit 15:13-16.

[6] Mesechet Shabbat 89b.

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

[8] Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 37:30.

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Weekly Parsha



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In Genesis, 41:1, we read of the dreams of Pharaoh. He saw seven lean cows swallow seven healthy cows; yet no enlargement could be seen in those lean cows. After waking and falling asleep a second time, Pharaoh dreams again, seeing seven full ears of grain being swallowed by seven thin ears, and again there was no telling that the thin ears swallowed the fat ones.

Pharaoh awoke and called to all his interpreters, but none could offer a pleasing interpretation...until Joseph.

Joseph told Pharaoh the following (Gen, 45:25): "25: The dream of Pharaoh is one, that which God plans to do has He shown to Pharaoh. 26: The seven good cows represent seven years, and the seven good ears represent seven years, it is one dream. 27: And the seven lean, bad cows that came up after them are seven years and the seven withered ears blown by the wind are seven years of famine. 28: This is the matter which I had told to Pharaoh, what God plans to do He has shown to Pharaoh."

Joseph continues to tell Pharaoh that first, there will be seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of great famine, and the famine will be so severe as to wipe away the memory of the plenty. Joseph explains why the dream was repeated, as God was to enact the plenty and the famine immediately. He then advises Pharaoh to store the plenty in preparation, thereby placing Pharaoh in control of all produce.

The questions which arise are as follows:

1) What did Pharaoh see in Joseph's interpretation, which satisfied him, as opposed to the Egyptian interpreters? The interpreters said that Pharaoh would have seven daughters and bury seven daughters. Joseph said the number seven represented years of plenty and famine. What is more satisfying in Joseph's interpretation?

2) In his interpretation, Joseph does not keep to the order of events. His first interpretation is in passage 27, where he commences mentioning the famine. But this takes place 'after' the plenty, so Joseph should have commenced with explaining that the fat cows or ears represented plenty. (These came first in Pharaoh's dreams.) Why the change in order?

3) Very significant is Joseph's statement in passage 28, "This is the matter which I had told to Pharaoh, what God plans to do He has shown to Pharaoh." As if to say, "you see Pharaoh, I have now proved what I was saying, that this is from God". It appears from this passage that Joseph contented himself that he had successfully proven to Pharaoh – already at this point – that it is God's plan. This would mean that in these words alone Joseph feels he has already convinced Pharaoh that the dreams are from God. What in his words convinced Joseph that he made his point clear?

A closer look at Joseph's words gives us the answer. Notice that Joseph repeats one element, "it is one dream". This repetition is what Joseph is trying to drive home in Pharaoh's mind. Pharaoh's astrologers do not mention this element of repetition.

Joseph differed from the astrologers not so much in the dream's content, but in his explanation of the 'style' of the dreams. Joseph showed Pharaoh that his dreams were exact duplicates; a phenomenon which does not have its source in dream dynamics, but rather, something only possible when emanating from a Divine Source – from God. Pharaoh was wise enough to see this as true. The proof of this explanation is not only Joseph's repetition, but in the fact that Joseph concluded to Pharaoh midstream in his explanation, that this is already proof enough that your dreams are Divine. Joseph said, "This is the matter which I had told to Pharaoh". Saying in other words, "you see, it is true." Joseph went on with the rest of the interpretation, but not as a proof of Divine origin. Joseph was convinced that this element of exact repetition proves that the dreams were from God. He therefore interrupted his interpretation to impress this upon Pharaoh.

While discussing this explanation with a friend, he quoted verse 41:32 later on, where Joseph said that the doubling of the dreams is to teach Pharaoh

that the matter is imminent, and not as I suggested, that it is to teach a divine pattern normally not seen in dreams. Perhaps this question did not bother me as much as the dreams bothered Pharaoh! But it was a good question. However, I then came across an Ibn Ezra which says that the doubling of the dreams teaching imminence, is derived not from the duplication per se, but from the doubling in "one night". According to Ibn Ezra, had the dreams been identical, but took place on separate nights, we would not learn of the imminence factor. Repeating dreams can take place over time, but Pharaoh's dreams occurred in one night. This taught imminence of the years of plenty and the ensuing famine. But identical dreams are from God according to Joseph. The other idea of imminence is why they both came in one night's sleep, and not over a few nights. This Ibn Ezra allows our original explanation to remain in place. Joseph was in fact stating that the identical nature of the dreams – not their single night's occurrence – taught the divine aspect. But the hurried nature of both dreams occurring in a single night, teaches the hurried nature of the famine's reality. It will happen immediately.

Ramban too, quoting Rabbi Eliezer, says that the one fact, that there were two dreams of cows and grain teaches that the matter was true and fixed. The second fact that both dreams occurred in a single night teaches that it is imminent.

We see that Joseph dreamt of the sheaves and stars bowing to him. The wine steward and baker had similar dreams too, and Pharaoh also had two similar dreams. This consistent pattern of duplicating dreams reveals to us that such dreams are divine, and something, which Joseph detected in each case, arriving at his determinations in all three instances that each dream was divine. 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".

The reason why Joseph commenced with interpreting the famine aspect first, was that Joseph desired to be freed from prison and avert this catastrophe. His calculation, which proved intelligent, was to hit Pharaoh with bad news before the good news, even though this distorted the order. Joseph is known as the chief psychologist in Jewish history, and he knew that people would attach themselves to the first element of news, even if followed by good tidings. By presenting Pharaoh with the stark reality of an utter and imminent famine, Joseph intended to render Pharaoh helpless, and in need of one who could save him – in need of a Joseph.

(continued on next page)

(Joseph continued from previous page)

Weekly Parsha

JOSEPH – PART II

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 experiencing his brothers' dismay at his retelling the first dream, Joseph nonetheless felt compelled for some reason, to repeat his second dream to his brothers and his father, in a second recounting. It was due to these dreams that the brothers conspired to kill Joseph...eventually selling him instead. It was his father who suggested and rejected an interpretation that they would all bow to Joseph: the 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 interpreting 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. Thus, the Rabbis teach that the brothers first sought out Joseph in places where those of broken spirit might dwell.

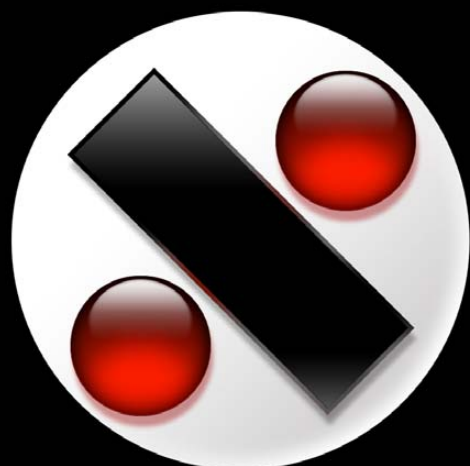
When Joseph sees his brothers, he "recalls the dreams". According to a wise Rabbi, this means that Joseph would use the Divine license provided by these dreams to subjugate his brothers into repentance. Creating a situation where the youngest Benjamin would be imprisoned on false charges, Joseph orchestrated a replica of his very own sale to force his brothers into a parallel dilemma. Would they abandon the accused Benja-

min now who ostensibly stole Joseph's goblet, as they had done 20 years earlier when they sold Joseph? Or, would they display complete repentance, and sacrifice themselves for their brother? Normally, one is not permitted to place anyone else under such a trial, but Joseph recognized his dreams as Divine in origin, and as a license to perfect his brothers. As this wise Rabbi taught, the first dream of the brothers' sheaves bowing to his – physical dominance – was the permission for Joseph's dominance over them in the spiritual realm – symbolized by the eleven stars, sun and moon. 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 the luminaries.

Subsequent to his dreams, Joseph understood their meaning; and not necessarily 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 accurate knowledge of dream interpretation, that he would eventually interpret the dreams of Pharaoh's stewards and Pharaoh himself, with such

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(Joseph continued from previous page)

Weekly Parsha

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 the young Joseph, as they apparently contributed to 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.

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

So the dreams perfected Joseph by contributing to his sale and refinement of his ego; they enabled Joseph to perfect his brothers by forcing them to repent for Joseph's sale by defending 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 soon to be the conductor of his family's repentance. He too must have reflected on his own state seeking repentance, "Why am I in prison? What is my sin?" He soon realized his dreams precipitated his descent into slavery, and that God gave him these dreams. He analyzed his dreams, and must have spent many hours, days, and weeks studying God's precise communications of the night. What did he discover?

Pharaoh and His Stewards

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 "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': 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)

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' dream duplications were 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, and 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 also 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

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(Joseph continued from previous page)

Weekly Parsha

and interpretation...the very matter essential for carving out 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.

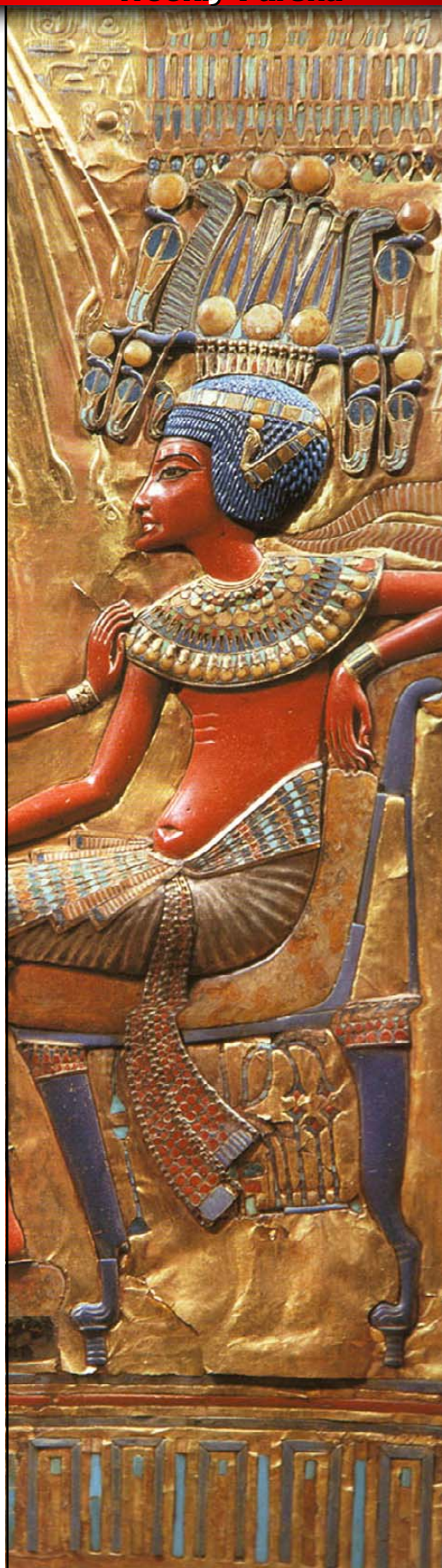
God, with a single brush stroke of Joseph's dreams, 1) placed Joseph in prison to humble him; 2) He caused the brothers to repent, this time not abandoning their youngest brother; 3) He caused Jacob to perfect his excessive love; and 4) He trained Joseph in the art of dream interpretation...the science 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 with His prophets in dreams, as stated in Numbers 12:6, it is for this reason. God wishes to indicate that just as natural 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 discovered. With that appreciation, Joseph delved into the study of dreams, both prophetic and mundane. He also determined that dreams of Divine origin contain a code, and once detected, can be understood. Joseph knew that wisdom is how God designed the world. Therefore, it is only with wisdom that man succeeds.



Relevance to Us

Does this lesson have any relevance in our lives? Without witnessing a miracle, we certainly cannot determine with any certainty that a given action is the hand of God. Maybe it is, maybe not. We do not know. We must review our successes and failures with the possibility that God's education of man can take one of 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 time and again. It is only through analyzing our ways and detecting whether 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 our needs. God teaches we require 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) ■

Letters



Letters

from our

READERS



Talking to the Dead?

Lorne: Your site is by far the most rewarding that I have ever encountered on the net. If your mission is to educate, then I salute you big time. You have certainly done a lot for me.

A minor concern though, would be the strict devotion to rationality to the point where some in the mainstream of Orthodox Judaism differ, than say Chassidim or other Kabbalists in a big way. This leads me to ask you a question. In the Torah, there is a strict prohibition from G-d to not contact the deceased. Does G-d say that these practices are imaginary, albeit dispicable and pagan; or that those engaged in them actually communicate with those who passed on? Is it because we live in rational times, in the era of science and reason that we interpret a commandment to mean that the practices are backwards and hold no meaning? Or did G-d intend to tell us this too from Sinai's time? The main point I think is that the practices are dispicable and dangerous and unholy, but are they also complete delusions, or did peoples actually communicate with the departed in some way, even if the departed's words to them were only stored thoughts in some cosmic scheme?

The Talmud also states that some Jews reported conversations with the deceased in cemeteries. Were the Talmudic sages only saying that the

people only believed that they were speaking to the dead, or did the sages imply that these people actually had conversations with spirits? If the latter, then why was it even mentioned in the Talmud if it is purely a physiological issue or problem?

Rabbi: Yes, there are differences among "orthodox" philosophies. And we differ greatly from Chassidism and Kabbalah. Now Lorne, you must admit that all views cannot be correct, since they oppose each other. How does one determine the true view?

We had discussed the method for determining truth in the last JewishTimes issue. Truth is determined by what we experience. And no one in history ever experienced a conversation with the dead. The dead don't respond. Never had, never will. That's what "dead" means.

And I will add that we don't live in rational times, if people today feel they can talk to the dead. These people are also in a contradiction, for they will defend their views by saying "Many things are true, even if not proven". (The famous fallback for those defending mystical or unproven beliefs.) Yet, ask these Chassidim and Kabbalists this: "*Why don't you accept Jesus; perhaps he really IS the Messiah? And why can't I accept him...if many things are true as you say, without proof?*" Suddenly, they will enage a line of reasoning to refute Jesus. At that point, tell them to use the same reasoning to reject talking to dead bodies. Hopefully, they will see their contradiction.

Some Jews have the idea that Torah prohibits magic, talking to the dead, idolatry, etc. But sadly, these Jews also think these practices truly work. Ibn Ezra (Leviticus, 19:31) says the following: "Those with empty brains say 'Were it not that fortune tellers and magicians were true, the Torah would not prohibit them.' But I (Ibn Ezra) say just the opposite of their words, because the Torah doesn't prohibit that which is true, but it prohibits that which is false. And the proof is the prohibition on idols and statues."

Lorne, God wishes man to perceive truth, and this is why he granted us intelligence. And as God prohibits numerous actions, it is precisely because they are false and remove us from truth. God does not prohibit man from attaining truth.

The instances you cite where the Talmud describes people talking to the dead must be approached as follows, and I quote a wise Rabbi on this verbatim:

"To paraphrase Shmuel Hanagid(1), the value of Aggadah (allegory) is found only in the gems of wisdom one derives from it. If one derives nonsense, it has no value. Very few people are capable of diving into the deep water and coming

up with pearls. [Ramban metaphor] Other individuals have no business delving into Aggadah. They would do better refraining from trying to interpret that which is beyond them. "Bmufrosh mimcha al tidrosh". Such people cannot discern between something literal or metaphorical."

Regarding the Baales Ove, who the Torah says communicated with the dead Samuel, she in fact did nothing. If you will study that area and read Radak, you will learn from the verses that she knew very well this was King Saul seeking Samuel. So she feigned that she saw Samuel out of recognition of the King. All that came to pass afterwards, i.e., that Saul died, was because Saul lost his own confidence due to his own imagined daydream of Samuel reiterating his previous rebuke, when Saul left Agag alive, ignoring God's commands that he slay him. Man – when not confident – will err in his activities, and unfortunately, Saul's next activity was war. Saul truly believed he heard Samuel foretell his imminent death at war, along with his son, and the Jews being captured. This was not prophetic, but Saul's own imagination. This was all a daydream, as one who is desperate to speak to someone of greatness like Samuel, may actually believe to be doing so. Saul previously displayed great insecurity a number of times; when appointed as king, he was hiding, (Sam I, 10:22) and upon capturing Amalek, he succumbed to the people's opinion to save the good cattle and the king, Agag. And throughout his relationship with David, Saul was paranoid of David, and sought to kill him. Again with regards to the Baales Ove, Saul demonstrated a great insecurity, and was so distressed, that he sought an idolatrous and useless means of contacting the dead Samuel: "When Saul saw the Philistine camp, he was greatly afraid and his heart trembled greatly." (Samuel I, 28:5) Out of his horror, Saul resorted to useless idolatry. This event must be explained in the context of King Saul's personality: instead of assuming forces which have never existed, nor exist today, we may readily explain this metaphorically, "as if" Saul contacted Samuel. The Torah thereby expresses in exaggerated terms, just how real Samuel was in Saul's insecure mind. ■

(1) "Intro to the Talmud", found at the end of Tractate Berachos

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We will publish questions and answers in this section.



the WISDOM of the WRITING

It is vital to reiterate fundamental ideas. The purpose in God granting His Torah is our unveiling His astonishing wisdom, so we might all fulfill our primary objective: attaining a true love of God. In His Torah, God teaches us laws, philosophies, and records the perfections of many individuals. But in literally each verse in all of these topics, God writes in a style we refer to as “Chochmas Hakasuv”, “the wisdom of the writing”. This wisdom is expressed in very subtle hints. We may notice Joseph repeating to Pharaoh that “his dreams are one”. This is to teach us why Joseph’s interpretations were accepted, while others were rejected: Joseph educated Pharaoh in an unnatural, repeating “design” in dreams that must be divine, when no one else did. We may wonder why in one verse God records that Pharaoh gave Joseph an Egyptian name, an Egyptian wife, and promotes Potiphera to priest. We thereby learn that Pharaoh attempted to silence those who accused Joseph of rape, by giving the very daughter as Joseph’s wife, and bribing Potiphera with a political position. An Egyptian name too obscures his true Hebrew roots, making him an acceptable ruler.

If in our studies we do not seek to detect and explain the verses’ brilliant nuances, repetitions, out-of-place words and other inconsistencies, we fail in Torah study and forfeit opportunities which can reveal God’s intended lessons.

As I continue to hear many simplistic Torah explanations, where today, very few Rabbis and teachers show the tremendous questions in the verses and explain them, I feel it necessary to draw your attention to the fact that a sea of marvelous insights awaits below the surface. I urge you to seek out those precious questions, and even more precious answers.

“If you seek it out like silver, and chase after it (Torah) like buried treasures, then you will understand the fear of God, and the knowledge of God will you find.” (Proverbs, 2:4)

Your Torah study must follow King Solomon’s advice, if you are to arrive at God’s intended lessons. Do not be merely ‘satisfied’ with a Torah explanation, when in reality, God designed each verse to amaze you.

—*Moshe Ben-Chaim*



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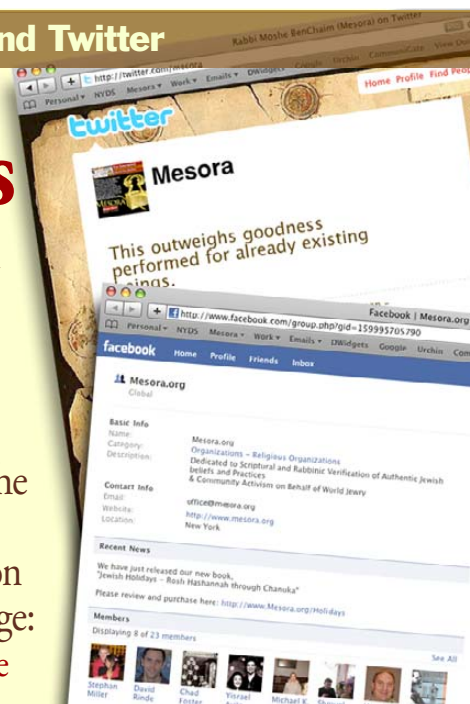
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