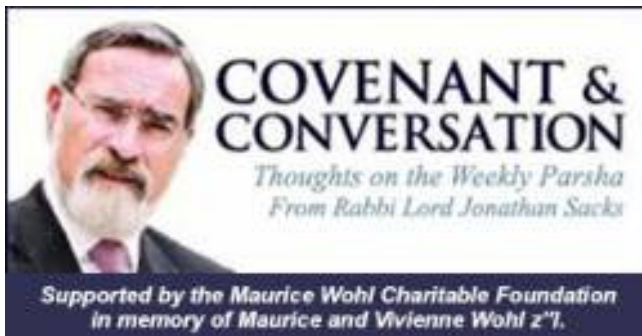


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### Moving Forwards

The book of Bereishit ends on a sublime note of reconciliation between Jacob's sons. Joseph's brothers were afraid that he had not really forgiven them for selling him into slavery. They suspected that he was merely delaying his revenge until their father died. After Jacob's death, they express their concern to him. But Joseph insists:

"Do not be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, do

not be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. (Gen. 50:19-21)

This is the second time Joseph has said something like this to them. Earlier he spoke similarly when he first disclosed that he – the man they thought was an Egyptian viceroy called Tzophnat Pa'aneach – was in fact their brother Joseph:

"I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no ploughing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God." (Gen. 45:3-8)

This is a crucial moment in the history of faith. It marks the birth of forgiveness, the first recorded moment at which one person forgives another for a wrong they have suffered. But it also establishes another important principle: the idea of Divine Providence. History is not, as Joseph Heller called it, "a trash bag of random coincidences blown open in the wind."<sup>1</sup> It has a purpose, a point, a plot. God is at work behind the scenes. "There's a divinity that shapes our ends," says Hamlet, "rough-hew them how we will."<sup>2</sup>

Joseph's greatness was that he sensed this. He saw the bigger picture. Nothing in his life, he now knew, had happened by accident. The plot to kill him, his sale as a slave, the false accusations of Potiphar's wife, his time in prison, and his disappointed hope that the chief butler would remember him and secure his release – all these events that might have cast him into ever-deeper depths of despair turned out in retrospect to be necessary steps in the journey that eventuated in his becoming second-in-command in Egypt and the one person capable of saving the whole country – as well as his own family – from starvation in the years of famine.

Joseph had, in double measure, one of the necessary gifts of a leader: the ability to keep going despite opposition, envy, false accusation and repeated setbacks. Every leader who stands for anything will face opposition. This may be a genuine conflict of interests. A leader elected to make society more equitable will almost certainly win the support of the poor and the antagonism of the rich. One elected to reduce the tax burden will do the opposite. It cannot be avoided. Politics without conflict is a contradiction in terms.

Any leader elected to anything, any leader more loved or gifted than others, will face envy. Rivals will question, "Why wasn't it me?" That is what Korach thought about Moses and Aaron. It is what the brothers thought about Joseph when they saw that their father favoured him. It is what Antonio Salieri thought about the more gifted Mozart, according to Peter Shaffer's play *Amadeus*.

As for false accusations, they have occurred often enough in history. Joan of Arc was accused of heresy and burned at the stake. A quarter century later she was posthumously declared innocent by an official court of inquiry. More than twenty people were put to death as a result of the Salem Witch Trials in 1692-3. Years later, as their innocence began to be perceived, a priest present at the trials, John Hale, admitted, "Such was the darkness of that day... that we walked in the clouds, and could not see our way."<sup>3</sup> The most famous false accusation of modern times was the trial of Alfred Dreyfus, a French officer of Jewish descent who was accused of being a German spy. The Dreyfus affair rocked France during the years 1894 and 1906, until Dreyfus was finally acquitted.

Setbacks are almost always a part of the life-story of the most successful. J. K. Rowling's initial Harry Potter novel was rejected by the first twelve publishers who received it. Another writer of a book about children suffered twenty-one rejections. The book was called *Lord of the Flies*, and its author, William Golding, was eventually awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

In his famous commencement address at Stanford University, the late Steve Jobs told the story of the three blows of fate that shaped his life: dropping out of university; being fired from Apple, the company he founded; and being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Rather than being defeated by them, he turned them all to creative use.

For twenty-two years I lived close to Abbey Road in North London, where a famous pop group recorded all their hits. At their first audition, they

performed for a record company who told them that guitar bands were “on their way out.” The verdict on their performance (in January 1962) was: “The Beatles have no future in show business.”

All this explains Winston Churchill’s great remark that “success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm.”

It may be that what sustains people through repeated setbacks is belief in themselves, or sheer tenacity, or lack of alternatives. What sustained Joseph, though, was his insight into Divine Providence. A plan was unfolding whose end he could only dimly discern, but at some stage he seems to have realised that he was just one of many characters in a far larger drama, and that all the bad things that had happened to him were necessary if the intended outcome was to occur. As he said to his brothers, “It was not you who sent me here, but God.”

This willingness to let events work themselves out in accordance with providence, this understanding that we are, at best, no more than co-authors of our lives, allowed Joseph to survive without resentment about the past or despair in the face of the future. Trust in God gave him immense strength, which is what we will all need if we are to dare greatly. Whatever malice other people harbour against leaders – and the more successful they are, the more malice there is – if they can say, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good,” they will survive, their strength intact, their energy undiminished.

### QUESTIONS (AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE)

1. How easy do you find it to trust that God is looking after you when things seem to be going terribly wrong?
2. Does this idea of Divine Providence give you the strength to forgive those who you feel may have acted against you?
3. Which of the lessons in leadership from Bereishit’s *Covenant & Conversation* pieces have most resonated with you?

### NOTES

1. Joseph Heller, *Good as Gold* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), 74.
2. *Hamlet*, Act 5, scene 2.
3. Quoted in Robert A. Divine et al., *America Past and Present*, vol. I (Pearson, 2001), 94.



### Who Is First?

*In the penultimate scene of Yaakov’s life, Yosef is summoned to his ailing father’s sick bed, and he brings his two sons with him. Previously, Yaakov had made Yosef promise to bury him in the Land of Israel. As his final days slip away, Yaakov stands poised to bless Yosef’s sons and grant them equal status among the tribes; Yaakov*

*assigns Ephraim and Menashe a place among his own sons, rather than among his grandsons. Their status as tribes effectively gives their father Yosef a "double portion," the birthright of the first-born son.*

Were Yaakov's parting interactions with Yosef merely additional expressions of the favoritism Yaakov had displayed toward Yosef in his youth? Why did Yaakov make his deathbed request for burial in the ancestral tomb specifically of Yosef, and not all of his sons? While we may say that it was Yosef, among all the sons, who had the power to fulfill this request, surely there would have been no harm in addressing all the sons as a group. And why were Yosef's sons alone raised to a status far above all of Yaakov's other grandchildren? Why were they, and by extension their father Yosef, favored with a double inheritance? Was this blessing a continuation of the preferential treatment that had sparked the brothers' jealousy and led them to sell Yosef into slavery?

After announcing this double inheritance, Yaakov asks that Ephraim and Menashe approach him and receive his blessing, but when they stand at their grandfather's bedside, Yaakov appears to become confused:

And Yisrael saw Yosef's sons, and (Yisrael) said, "Who are these?" (Bereishit 48:8)

There are several possible explanations for this confusion: In a subsequent verse, we are told that Yaakov (Yisrael) had limited eyesight (Bereishit 48:10). Perhaps he simply could not see, or was no longer able to see well enough to distinguish between them.<sup>1</sup> A second possibility is that

Yosef's Egyptian-born sons looked strange and unfamiliar to Yaakov, due to their regal dress and carriage and their foreign upbringing.<sup>2</sup> A third possibility, raised by Rashi, is that Yaakov's lack of clarity was not a problem of eyesight but of clairvoyance: At that moment, Yaakov lost his prophetic vision. He became frightened, not confused, and his question was not aimed at clarifying the names or identities of his grandsons, but of their worthiness, their spiritual identity:

**And Yisrael saw Yosef's sons** – he wished to bless them but the Divine Presence departed from him because he saw that from Ephraim would be born the wicked kings Yerovam and Ahav, and from Menasheh Yehu and his sons (Midrash Tanchuma, Vayechi 6). **(Yisrael) asked, "Who are these?"** – from where did these come, who are unfit for blessing? (Rashi, Bereishit 48:8)

According to Rashi, there was evil lurking in the future, something that Yaakov had never seen before, and this caused him to lose his *ruach hakodesh* and to question whether these sons of Yosef were in fact deserving of the blessing he was about to bestow on them. Yaakov saw evil in the future: Yerovam, Ahav, and Yehu, three wicked kings of Israel, were descendants of Yosef.

Yaakov could not imagine that Yosef would spawn such offspring. He had never seen any negative sides to his favorite son's personality. Yosef was the golden child, Yaakov's favorite.<sup>3</sup> From a very young age, Yaakov knew that Yosef was destined for greatness. He dressed Yosef in the special, regal clothes, making it plain to

anyone who saw him that Yosef was the anointed one.

For the most part, Yosef's dreams were consonant with Yaakov's expectations and aspirations: Yosef, the son of his beloved wife Rachel, was not like his other children, and his dreams of economic and political dominance simply echoed what Yaakov had already intuited: Yosef was born to lead. Yaakov's other children, however, did not take kindly to the predictions of their own subservience. Their jealousy led to hatred, which nearly led to murder, ultimately resulted in the sale of Yosef.

From the moment, he retells his dreams to his father and brothers, Yosef's dreams remain just below the surface of the narrative for the remainder of Bereishit. Thus, the brothers refer to what they believe to be Yosef's delusions of grandeur as they plot to dispose of him:

"Then one said to the other, "Here comes that **dreamer**. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we can say, 'A savage beast devoured him;' then we shall see what becomes of his **dreams**!" (Bereishit 37:19-20)

Many years later, when the brothers come searching for food, they do not imagine that Yosef's dreams of power and economic superiority were not delusions but prophecies. They bow to Yosef, as his dream predicted they would; they beg him for food, as his dreams predicted they would. For Yosef, the dreams are a real and powerful element of his consciousness; he remembers the dreams from the moment his brothers re-enter his life:

Now Yosef was the vizier of the land; it was he who dispensed rations to all the people of the land. And Yosef's brothers came and bowed low to him, with their faces to the ground. When Yosef saw his brothers, he recognized them; but he acted like a stranger toward them and spoke harshly to them. He asked them, "Where do you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to procure food." For though Yosef recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. Recalling the **dreams** that he had **dreamed** about them, Yosef said to them, "You are spies, you have come to see the land in its nakedness." (Bereishit 42:6-9)

In an exchange dripping with delicious irony, the brothers bow to the powerful supplier of food, yet they do not know that is their long-lost, nearly-murdered brother, whom they had kidnapped and sold. Yosef alone remembers the dreams, and the dreams have come true.<sup>4</sup> Yet it seems almost like the famous philosophical conundrum: If a tree falls in the forest and no one hears... Can we say that the brothers have truly bowed to Yosef if they do not know who he is? Must they actually experience and internalize their subservience to their brother, or acknowledge Yosef's greatness, for the dreams to be fulfilled?

Setting this question aside for the moment, we might remind ourselves that the dreams are a subtext, as we have noted, and not the central theme of the tension that builds in the course of their encounter. The larger issue seems to be that Yosef is gauging his brothers' morality: Have they remained the same jealous, devious bunch? Is his younger brother Binyamin safe? Is his father still alive? Have they been transformed by the years of



separation? Do they regret how they treated him? Is there still a chance for reconciliation?

From the moment Yosef heard Pharaoh's dreams, he knew that his brothers would arrive – sooner rather than later. He also knew that as soon as they arrived, they would bow – but there was much more that he did not know. And so, when they do arrive, and when they bow to him, oblivious to his true identity, Yosef watches and listens carefully. He puts them through a series of rigorous tests in order to answer his own questions, and in the end the brothers – particularly Yehuda – pass the test: Yehuda is prepared to sacrifice himself and become a slave so that Binyamin can be free. Yosef, who has first-hand insight as to the physical and emotional price this entails, is moved; Yehuda's extraordinary gesture allows Yosef to bring the charade to an end, and to reveal his identity.

The real question is, what's next? Essentially, only Yosef can answer this question; after all, he holds all the cards. Yosef is in charge – not only of Egypt, and of the fate of his brothers, but also of the type of reconciliation, if any, they can expect, and the new rules of engagement.

There are three obvious possibilities:

First: Yosef punishes his brothers. He recalls everything he went through because of them – the humiliation, slavery, mortal danger, and estrangement from his beloved father. As we have already noted,<sup>5</sup> the former apprentice to the chief executioner of Egypt surely had the knowledge, power and means to subject his brothers to unimaginable pain. Alternatively, sentencing them to live out their lives as slaves might have been

the just and equitable punishment for their perfidy. Nonetheless, Yosef has no thoughts of revenge.

Second: Yosef wipes the slate clean, expunges the past, and starts from scratch, building a new relationship with his now-transformed brothers, on equal footing with them at last. This approach would arguably go a long way toward excising the cancerous feelings of jealousy and hatred which are in danger of growing even stronger than they had been, festering and metastasizing on the fertile ground of Yosef's success.

Yosef chooses a third path: While he does not take revenge, he does not seek equality. An analysis of the language of the verses that describe their relationship reveals his plan, his thoughts – and his dreams for the future.

Yosef said to his brothers, "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so shaken were they on account of him. (Bereishit 45:3)

Yosef speaks, and the text stresses that it is to his brothers that he addresses himself. This very loaded term gives us hope for fraternity and brotherhood, but that hope quickly disappears: Yosef asks, "Is **my father** still alive?" Had he wished for reconciliation, he would surely have included them: "Is **our father** still alive?"

The brothers are in shock; they are speechless. Yosef tries, once again, to engage them. There are many things he can say to assure them of his identity, and he urges them to come close – but then he chooses to remind them of the most

painful parts of their relationship, using words that must have cut like the jagged edge of a knife:

Then Yosef said to his brothers, "Please, come forward to me." And when they came forward, he said, "I am your brother Yosef, whom you sold into Egypt. (Bereishit 45:4)

Yosef assures them he is, in fact, their brother, that he has returned from the grave they dug for him in their minds; he is the same Yosef they had sold all those years ago. Once again, Yosef creates a moment of closeness – "I am Yosef your **brother**" – but quickly follows with a crushing dose of blunt truth – "whom you sold into [slavery in] Egypt." Had he sought reconciliation, there were so many other words he could have used to convince them of his identity. But Yosef continues, and a deviousness emerges:

Now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me to this place; it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you. It is now two years that there has been famine in the land, and there are still five years to come in which there shall be no yield from tilling. God has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival on earth, and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance. So, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his household, and ruler over the whole land of Egypt. (Bereishit 45:5-8)

With an artfully crafted explanation that displays his brilliance, Yosef praises God for bringing him to Egypt and to his lofty position, and at the same time exonerates his brothers, removing them completely from the narrative. On the one hand, he explains that God's master-plan brought him to

Egypt and secured him in a position of unimaginable power. Many lives, including their own, will be saved. But lest they receive any credit, even incidental credit, for anything good that results from Yosef rise to power, he stresses that this was all the work of God. The sub-text is extraordinary: Yosef knew, from the start, that he would achieve greatness. He tried to tell them, to share his worldview, but they scorned him and scoffed at his predictions. They were so far off the mark, he tells them, that they cannot take any credit whatsoever for the fortuitous outcome, because they were oblivious to the truth all along. They were nothing more than pawns, marionettes whose strings were pulled by the master of the Divine drama that catapulted Yosef to the top. He alone, he tells them in his just-subtle enough speech, has always been the star of the show. He has always been the main character; they are merely "extras" in a cast of thousands. Yosef gives God all the credit; he wants them to understand that God is on his side.

Yosef's speech is stunning. These are not the words of a man seeking peace, love, fraternity, or reconciliation. The speech is self-serving from start to finish, bordering on narcissistic, and these same tropes are echoed in his instructions for breaking the news to his father that he is alive:

"Now, hurry back to my father and say to him: 'Thus says your son Yosef, 'God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me without delay. You will dwell in the region of Goshen, where you will be near me – you and your children and your grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all that is yours. There I will provide for you; – for there are yet five years of famine to come – that

you and your household and all that is yours may not suffer want.' You can see for yourselves, and my brother Binyamin for himself, that it is indeed I who am speaking to you. And you must tell my father everything about my high station in Egypt and all that you have seen; and bring my father here with all speed." (Bereishit 45:9-13)

Yosef wants his father to know that God has placed him as leader and lord over Egypt; again, he refers to **his** father, not **their** (collective) father, and **his** own personal glory, power, and honor. The benevolent Yosef lets it be known that he will care for them all, provide them with food, homes, and all their other needs – yet his benevolence comes at a price. He infantilizes his brothers by caring for them, creating total dependence on his good graces rather than employing them in meaningful, productive positions.<sup>6</sup> His benevolence feeds and strengthens his dreams; the reality he creates surpasses even his dreams.

What do the brothers hear? How do they interpret his kindness? Apparently, they see what they had always seen: Yosef's narcissism. Even when Yosef embraces them and cries on the shoulders of each of his brothers, only Binyamin reciprocates; the other brothers stand stone cold, either in shock or in disgust. They are convinced that they had been right about Yosef from the start.

With that he embraced his brother Binyamin around the neck and wept, and Binyamin wept on his neck. He kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; only then were his brothers able to talk to him. (Bereishit 45:14-15)

Yosef shares with his brothers a state secret, there would be five more years of drought and hunger. Yosef prides himself into seeing into the future, and shares with his brothers, they should tell Yaakov who should hurry down.

As the brothers leave, Yosef shows favoritism to his full brother Binyamin, mistakes from the past will not be corrected, they will be institutionalized, for Yosef the story has a happy ending. He has been vindicated, and now all his brothers know it. The tree which fell in the forest could now be heard loud and clear.

To each of them, moreover, he gave a change of clothing; but to Binyamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of clothing. And to his father he sent the following: ten donkeys laden with the best things of Egypt, and ten she-asses laden with grain, bread, and provisions for his father on the journey. As he sent his brothers off on their way, he told them, "Do not be quarrelsome on the way." (Bereishit 45:22-24)

Upon returning to Yaakov, the brothers share the news in more subdued tones: Yosef is alive, and he rules over Egypt. After overcoming his initial disbelief, Yaakov comes back to life, and his spirit of prophecy returns.

They went up from Egypt and came to their father Yaakov in the land of Canaan. And they told him, "Yosef is still alive, and he is ruler over the whole land of Egypt." His heart went numb, for he did not believe them. But when they recounted all that Yosef had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent to transport him, the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived. "Enough!" said Yisrael. "My son Yosef is still



alive! I must go and see him before I die."  
(Bereishit 45:25-28)

While Yosef had his dreams which indeed came true, Yaakov armed with prophecy, sees further into the future:

So Yisrael set out with all that was his, and he came to Beer Sheva, where he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Yitzchak. God called to Yisrael in a vision by night: "Yaakov! Yaakov!" He answered, "I am here." And He said, "I am God, the God of your father. Fear not to go down to Egypt, *for I will make you there into a great nation*. I Myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I Myself will also bring you back; and Yosef's hand shall close your eyes." (Bereishit 46:1-4)

Yaakov has been told they will become a numerous people during this sojourn; clearly, this vision extends well beyond five years into the future that Yosef is able to see. Yaakov understands that this exile will continue for hundreds of years. He knows that the fruition of the covenant God made with Avraham has begun; slavery and affliction will soon follow. Yosef can amuse himself with his power, but Yaakov knows it is temporary. Although Yaakov lives out his years in Egypt, reunited with the son he always loved, but he is nonetheless preoccupied with the future.

Now, we return to the deathbed scene. Yaakov is taken aback; he sees something coming, something evil that emerges from Yosef, something he had never seen before: Yosef's descendants will be self-centered, narcissistic leaders who will lead the nation astray. In shock,

Yaakov asks, "Who are these people?"<sup>7</sup> – even though the people standing at his bedside are Yosef's sons Efraim and Menashe, whom we have every reason to believe were fine, upstanding young men. Yaakov feels his prophetic vision slipping away in the face of something sinister, and he is shocked and alarmed: This is a side of Yosef he had never seen – but perhaps should have seen. Our sages point out Yosef's immaturity and narcissism from a very early stage in his life story: And Israel saw the sons of Joseph, and he said: "Who are these?" This verse seems to contradict the statement a few verses later that "the eyes of Israel were dim from age, so that he could not see". What this verse really means, however, is that he saw through the Holy Spirit those later descendants of Joseph, Jeroboam and his fraternity. Jeroboam made two golden calves and said: These are thy gods, O Israel (1 Kings 12:28). Hence Israel now said, "Who are these?" That is, "Who is he that will one day say these to idols?" From this passage, we learn that the righteous see into the distant future and God crowns them with His own crown. (Zohar, Bereishit, 227b)

This is the line of Yaakov: At seventeen years of age, Yosef tended the flocks with his brothers, and he was a lad (*naar*) to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. And Yosef brought bad reports of them to their father. (Bereishit 37:2)

**...and he was a lad (*naar*)** – His actions were childish: he dressed his hair, he touched up his eyes so that he should appear goodlooking. (Rashi, Bereishit 37:2, based on Bereishit Rabbah 84:7)

He left all that he had in Yosef's hands and, with him there, he paid attention to nothing save the food that he ate. Now Yosef was well built and handsome. (Bereishit 39:6)

**And Yosef was well built and handsome** – as soon as he saw that he was ruler (in the house) he began to eat and drink and curl his hair. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "Your father is mourning and you curl your hair! I will let a bear loose against you" (Midrash Tanchuma, Vayeshev 8). Immediately... (Rashi Bereishit 39:6)

The Rabbis see something that evades Yaakov's detection, something selfabsorbed in Yosef's personality. Yosef is certain that he is destined to lead, and he is attracted to the trappings of leadership.

In Yosef's descendants, specifically the kings cited above, this dysfunction morphs into a pathological spiritual sickness. Yerovam thinks it wise to repeat the greatest offense committed by his ancestors, and builds not one but two golden calves. He stations guards at the border crossings to prevent Jews from making pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Yerovam is willing to lead an entire generation astray just to assure his exalted position.

In one of the most extreme expressions of this illness, the rabbis tell of a conversation between God and Yerovam:

"And after this matter, Yerovam did not repent from his evil ways" (I Kings 13:33). What does "after" refer to? Rabbi Abba says: After the Holy One, Blessed be He, grabbed Yerovam by his garment, and said to him: Repent, and you and I

and the son of Yishai will stroll together in the Garden of Eden. (Yerovam) said to Him: Who will be in the lead? (God) said to (Yerovam): The son of Yishai will be in the lead. (Yerovam) said: If so, I am not interested. (Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 102a)

This passage expresses the almost unimaginable, unmitigated gall of Yerovam: God "grabbed Yerovam by his garment" – a phrase that directly links Yerovam with his forefather Yosef. He is offered a stroll with God and the Messiah in the Garden of Eden, the most exclusive journey (pilgrimage?) in the most exclusive, exalted company – but his first question is, "Who is first?" Who will take the lead? Can Yerovam have imagined that God Himself would take a back seat to a mortal king? God seems to go along, hoping to teach Yerovam a lesson in humility, and does not put Himself in the lead, but when Yerovam hears that he himself will not be the star of the show – he rejects God!

This is the side of Yosef the brothers always saw. They sensed that his first, perhaps his only concern, was self-aggrandizement. And yet, Yosef's clothes were left behind when he escaped from the clutches of Mrs. Potifar, while Yerovam's garments are torn from him as he escapes the grasp of God – and there, in a nutshell, lies the complexity of Yosef. Yosef managed to suppress the negative aspects of his personality; Yerovam did not. But the brothers could not see this. When they looked at Yosef, they saw only the vainglorious, self-righteous, pretentious side of his personality. While Yaakov was blind to Yosef's darker side, the brothers were blind to the positive side. They knew

nothing about Yosef's spiritual struggles and victories. They knew nothing of the temptations he faced and overcame. They did not hear him speak about God to all those around him, even at his own peril. They did not know that he took no personal credit for interpreting Pharaoh's dreams and saving Egypt. They did not know how truly great he was. And so, even when he delivers a speech and makes a commitment to set aside the past and care for them and their families, they hear the "B side" of the record: Yosef "forgives" them "for nothing;" he intimates that they were unimportant details in the story. Once again, they see and the parts of his personality they had always hated. Even worse, they were afraid of him:

Yosef returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father. When Yosef's brothers saw that their father had died, they said, "What if Yosef still bears a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrong that we did him!" So they sent this message to Yosef, "Before his death your father left this instruction: So shall you say to Yosef, 'Forgive, I urge you, the offense and guilt of your brothers who treated you so harshly.' Therefore, please forgive the offense of the servants of the God of your father." And Yosef was in tears as they spoke to him. His brothers went to him themselves, flung themselves before him, and said, "We are prepared to be your slaves." But Yosef said to them, "Have no fear! Am I a substitute for God? Besides, although you intended me harm, God intended it for good, so as to bring about the present result – the survival of many people. And so, fear not. I will sustain you and your children."

Thus, he reassured them, speaking kindly to them. (Bereishit 50:14-21)

Despite living as a reunited family for seventeen years, the brothers were far from convinced that this was the true Yosef. They were convinced that the d.tente achieved was only due to their father's presence. Now, with Yaakov dead and buried, Yosef would take his "pound of flesh" and kill them all. Yosef for his part is shocked by their mistrust, hurt by the knowledge that they could even suspect him of such thoughts. He repeats the speech he had given when he first revealed his identity, and again exonerates them, explaining that this was God's will.

If Yosef's goal was rapprochement, he failed; if, however, his goal was to demonstrate his superiority, he was successful.

Yosef remains a complex character. He achieved dizzying power, unimaginable success. He created a system of social welfare in the depths of the dark ages by applying the teachings of Avraham on a national scale: Whereas Avraham opened his tent to tend to those in need, Yosef anticipated and responded to the needs of an empire,<sup>8</sup> all the while remaining true to the faith of Avraham, he had learned from his fathers, never losing sight of the hand of God that made his accomplishments possible.

Is this split – in Yosef's personality, and between Yosef and his brothers – ever healed? The final chapter of Yosef's life story is one of true reconciliation:

Yosef said to his brothers, "I am about to die. God will surely take notice of you and bring you up

from this land to the land that He promised on oath to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov." So Yosef made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here." Yosef died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt. (Bereishit 50:24-26)

On his deathbed, in his final words to his brothers, Yosef begs them to promise that they will take his remains with them when they leave Egypt; he longs to be a part of the family, and not a part of the Egyptian pantheon. At last, there is peace – not only because the man they fear is on death's door, but because a real change has occurred. If we listen carefully, as the brothers most certainly did, we hear a different Yosef. Yosef finally understood what his father Yaakov had known before he came to Egypt; this would not be a five-year visit to wait out the famine. This is not the story of Yosef. This is the start of a long, difficult exile. Yosef's dreams are no longer the point; history has moved on. They are now all characters in the dreams and visions of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. The Children of Israel – Yosef's included, will be in Egypt for a very long time – but God will redeem them, and when He does, Yosef wants to be a part of it. He wants to leave with his brothers – the brothers who may never have loved him, who certainly never displayed love for him; the brothers for whom he had cared for the past seventy years.

Now, something has changed: Yosef, who had always been so brash, so confident, was suddenly vulnerable. For the first time, he needed them – not as pawns or marionettes in his show, but as

brothers. When he acknowledges that, their relationship changes: At last, they are equals. They promise Yosef that they will see that his remains are returned home. And the moment they make this vow, the family finally becomes whole. They are brothers at last, equals, the founders of one nation.

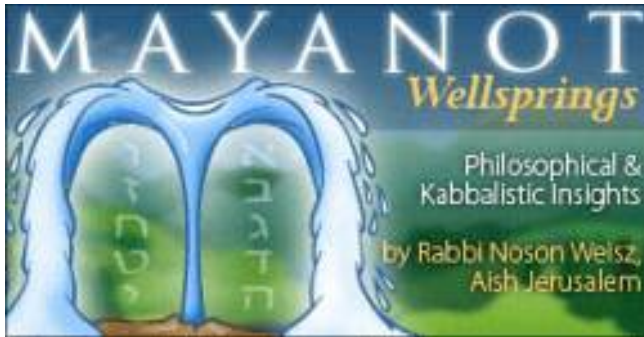
Pharaoh would forget Yosef, but his brothers, who finally felt like brothers, would never forget Yosef. And the brothers who sold him into slavery would bring him back home, as brothers, forever, at last.

*Chazak chazak vnitchazek!*

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1. Rashbam, Bereishit 48:8.
2. Malbim, Bereishit 48:8.
3. The text (Bereishit 37:3) stresses that Yisrael loved Yosef because he was a "*ben zekunim*" which is understood by Rashi as a clever son. The name Yisrael, tends to be used on a more national as opposed to personal level. This would indicate that Yaakov/Yisrael thought that on objective terms he favored Yosef. Later in the narrative, the brothers acknowledge that Yosef was loved by Yaakov.
4. Many debate the extent of fulfillment of the dreams, only ten and not eleven bowed, a brother was missing, their father (and Yosef's mother) were missing. Nonetheless in terms of substance of the dreams, their sheaves bowing to his sheaves, and the stars bowing to him – represent Yosef supplying food specifically, and his power generally, these elements did come true.
5. Parashat Vayigash 5778 "Emotional Truth: Becoming Brothers Once Again" <http://arikahn.blogspot.co.il/2017/12/parashat-vayigash-5778-emotional-truth.html>
6. See comments of Radak to Bereishit 46:34, Yosef did not want his brothers to receive government positions. Presumably Paroh would adduce if having one "Yosef" work for him changed the economy of Egypt – imagine what a team of twelves "Yosefs" could do.
7. See my essay "Who Are These": <http://www.aish.com/tp/i/moha/48937092.html>, specifically note the Zohar cited which links the question of Yaakov: "Who are these" *mi eleh*, with the declaration made when the Golden Calf in the desert and the pair of golden calves by Yerovam were constructed and worshiped. ("these are your gods Israel" – *eleh alohecha Yisrael*).

8. See Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik "Vision and Leadership – Reflection on Joseph and Moses" Toras HoRav Foundation, Ktav 2013, page 28ff.



### The Body and the Self

*And the time drew nearer that Israel must die; and he called his son Joseph and said to him, "If now I have found grace in your sight, put, I beg you, your hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me: Bury me not, I beg you, in Egypt. I will lie with my fathers, and you shall carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their burying place." And he (Joseph) said, "I will do as you have said." And he (Jacob) said, "Swear to me." And he swore to him. (Genesis 47:29-31)*

The commentators explain that Jacob made this request to Joseph because he was the only one among his children who had the power necessary to carry it out. He foresaw that the Egyptians would resist allowing him to be buried elsewhere, and it would need the offices of a very powerful person like Joseph to ensure compliance with Jacob's desire to be buried in Israel in the Cave of the Machpelah.

This is also the reason Jacob made Joseph take an oath to comply with his wish. It is not that he

didn't trust him. He wanted to provide Joseph with a powerful argument with which to confront Pharaoh. He could sincerely tell Pharaoh that he was bound by his sacred oath to carry out Jacob's final request. In the face of the oath Pharaoh could not withhold permission. Indeed we find that Pharaoh specifically refers to the oath:

*And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father as he made you swear to do." (Genesis 50:6)*

### JOSEPH'S REQUEST

At the end of this Torah portion, we find Joseph making a similar request:

*Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely remember you and bring you up out of this land, to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Then Joseph adjured the children of Israel saying, "When God will indeed remember you, then you must bring my bones up out of here." (Genesis 50:24-25)*

Tradition teaches us that all the sons of Jacob made this request to the Jewish people, and in fact, when the Jewish people left Egypt, they took all the bones and reburied them in Israel. But the mission of transporting Joseph's bones was so especially important, that this duty fell to Moses himself.

*Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had firmly adjured the children of Israel saying, "God will surely remember you, and you shall bring up my bones from here with you." (Exodus 13:19)*



How can the modern mind relate to attaching so much importance to what happens to a person's body or skeleton after he dies? What difference does it make where one's bones are buried or even if they are buried at all? Every so often one reads in the newspapers about "religious fanatics" that are obstructing the work of serious archeologists exploring ancient burial sites on the grounds of sanctity. Is this truly just empty fanaticism?

### **A MATTER OF RESPECT**

To understand the idea behind the importance of the disposal of bodies we have to familiarize ourselves with the Torah concept of *kavod* or "respect."

Rabbi Zracha Halevi, one of the greatest medieval commentators on the Talmud says the following in his introduction:

The living human soul is referred to many times in the Holy Scriptures as *kavod* ... [because] it is through the soul that the Creator imbued man with His own splendor, and it is this soul that is the essence of man, always striving toward its own origin...

To understand this notion of equating the soul with *kavod*, we must get a better sense of how man shows respect for God on earth and how he earns his reward for doing so.

Jewish tradition teaches that man was placed on earth and given free will so that he can earn his reward. Generally speaking, rewards are related to productivity. People are rewarded for producing something beneficial that the world requires. Thus policemen provide security, bus drivers supply

transportation, doctors heal the sick, lawyers arrange matters in a way that will avoid disputes and so on. Their rewards are commensurate with importance assigned to the benefit of their work.

If so, man must be in a position to supply God with something that is very necessary and beneficial to God. In return for the service man performs, God offers the reward of eternal life. Such a great reward must involve the production of some great benefit. What is this benefit?

The answer is *kavod*. Man produces recognition of God. Recognition is respect. Respect requires appreciation and notice.

### **OF FREE WILL**

If someone threatens me with a gun to my head, I will honor his wishes with great diligence, but there is no *kavod* in such compliance. It is not that I feel any respect for him, I am simply terrified of his gun.

But if I follow what the wise man tells me to do, it is out of a feeling of respect. He has no power over me at all. I recognize the value of his advice and choose to follow it because I wish to, not because I am forced. The strength of this wish is the measure of my respect.

God gave us free will. This free will is necessarily accompanied by a feeling of independence. If we were forced to recognize our dependence on God's good will by the realities of the world around us -- like we are forced to recognize our dependence on sunlight or rainfall -- our compliance to His dictates would not be a symbol of our respect -- we'd be responding to the gun to our heads.

Only because it takes intelligence and choice to recognize our connection with God and our dependence on Him, does our compliance to the dictates of His Torah become an indication of our respect for Him. In short, our observance of God's Torah of our own free will is the source of the *kavod* God has in the world.

The product of our Divine service -- that only we can produce for we are the only creatures in the universe who have free will -- is *kavod*. Without us this resource simply does not exist. Not even an omnipotent God could create it without the aid of a creature who has free will.

### VALUABLE RESOURCE

We can only appreciate the value of *kavod* in the scheme of things if we bear in mind that the purpose of God's interaction with human beings is the establishment of a relationship that is warm and personal to say the least. The ultimate aim of all our Divine service is to be able to bond with G-d for eternity, the very definition of *olam haba*, "the world to come."

The establishment of this type of relationship is quite complex for the truth is that God really is holding a gun to our heads! We really are dependant on Divine energy for every breath that we draw and every step that we take. This makes the development of any relationship with God extremely difficult. You cannot relate to the person who is holding a gun to your head except with abject terror. G-d is thus forced to conceal the weapon he is holding to our heads, and wait patiently while we figure out with our own intelligence and through our free will that we are really His full dependents.

When we come to this realization of our dependency on God on our own, it hits us together with the knowledge that God concealed the true state of affairs because He really does not want to use His weapons and is interested in establishing relationships. What would otherwise be terror becomes transformed into *kavod*, which makes *kavod* a very valuable resource indeed.

### THE HUMAN SIDE

If we examine the human side of this concept of *kavod*, it is easy to realize that it is precisely because of the concept of *kavod* that we do not relate to Jacob's concern over the disposal of his remains. Respect and recognition are directly related to uniqueness, and there is nothing unique about our bodies except for surface appearance. Our need to eat is the same as everyone else's, our desire to procreate is identical to that of every other human being's and so forth.

Our attitude to our bodies does not fall under the heading of respect. Our great concern for their integrity and welfare can more appropriately be characterized as terror, because we cannot live without our bodies. This is why we stand guard over our bodies with great diligence. This concern is once again akin to the terror of the person with the gun to your head and not *kavod*. As our bodies are pretty much standard issue except in regard to their surface appearance, which totally disappears through the decomposition caused by death, we cannot relate to the idea of being concerned about them after they are no longer necessary for life.

If we believe that something remains of us after we die, it is because, in our opinion, whatever remains has the property of uniqueness.

But what if our bodies were also an expression of our uniqueness? What if they were imbued with the same uniqueness as our minds and personalities? If we believed that, then we would extend our idea of survival after death to embrace our bodies as well.

But can our bodies truly be an adjunct of our characters?

The answer is yes, as we are about to see from this exchange between Jacob and Joseph.

### WHO ARE THESE?

*Then Israel saw Joseph's sons and he said, "Who are these?" And Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons whom God has given me here." He said, "Bring them to me please, and I will bless them." (Genesis 48:8-9).*

The commentators are disturbed by this conversation. Jacob had lived in Egypt for seventeen years by this time. He had seen Joseph's children many times. Indeed, he had just finished assigning them equal status with Reuben and Shimon. How can we understand his question, "Who are these?"

Rashi explains in the name of the Midrash that when Jacob came to bless Ephraim and Menashe, he felt the Divine Presence depart from him because he saw that descendants of Joseph's sons would be responsible for corrupting the Jewish people. Jacob's query to Joseph is to be understood as: "Where did these evil buds originate? When I look inside myself, I find no such flaw, so they must originate in you, Joseph. How could this have come about?"

Joseph answers:

*Joseph said to his father, "These are my sons whom God (Elohim) has given me in this place." (Genesis 48:9)*

God's name *Elohim*, with which He created the world, is a composite of *mi eleh* -- which in Hebrew literally means "Who are these?" When there is a synthesis between the two elements of the holy name *Elohim* the blessing of God falls on those who forge the synthesis. When these two elements of the holy name are separated, the blessings of *Elohim* are absent.

Because God chose to conceal His presence in the universe for the reasons explained above, the connection between heaven and earth can only be formed in the mind of a person. The universe as it first appears to the human eye, is composed entirely of things. Even living beings are things. Physical life is a function of purely physical and chemical processes after all. The soul, or mind or character sit among these things which define physical existence.

This dichotomy of soul and body is symbolized by the separation of these two words, *mi*, "who," and *eleh*, "these."

According to the common perception described above, these two concepts are entirely separate. "Who" represents the mind, the personality, the character, the unique and immortal part of man, whereas "these" represent the body, the impersonal machine whose job is to feed, to serve as a tool for action, to procreate. Respect, or *kavod*, attaches to the "who," and not to "these."

But this is an incomplete vision. *Elohim* cannot attach to a being in which these two ideas are separate. *Elohim*, can only attach where there is a synthesis between these two ideas. The *kavod* that is the product of human observance of the Torah's commandments is the synthesis of these two ideas.

The object of all the commandments is to direct all the activities of the body to become expressions of God's *kavod* unique to each individual. All of us are placed in unique circumstances and given unique abilities, so that the synthesis we create between *mi* and *eleh*, representing our own vision of *Elohim*, is unique to ourselves.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto explains in his work "Derech Hashem," that the Torah description of the human being as a marriage between a body and a soul is a description that stands for all eternity. The world of souls came into being only as a result of Adam's sin. Because Adam fell and death had to be introduced into the world, the soul has to have a place to sit out and await the resurrection. But the world to come only happens for those who can be reunited with their bodies.

The body of the next world will be significantly different than the one we wear in this one world. As long as we are alive here, even if we create no synthesis between *mi* and *eleh*, the body and the soul, we can still survive, because this world is not a world of *kavod*. But the next world is a world of pure *kavod*. There, only bodies that have character and personalities and therefore deserve *kavod* can be resurrected.

## THE BONES OF JOSEPH

Let us attempt to bring this down to earth by expanding the story of Joseph's bones referred to earlier.

*Then there was an opportune day when he entered the house to do his work -- no man of the household staff being there in the house -- that she caught hold of him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" But he left his garment in her hand, and he fled, and went outside. (Genesis, 39:11-12)*

... the sea parted its waters in the merit of Joseph's bones, as it is written, *The sea saw and ran* (Psalms 114). What did the sea see? It saw the bones of Joseph, just as he fled, the sea fled. (Genesis Raba 87:8 among many other places)

The commentators explain:

When Joseph entered the house to do his work he was ready to surrender to the lure of Potiphar's wife. His resistance to the temptation she represented was washed away by a tidal wave of desire. She had really caught hold of him by his garment as a person's true garment is his body. When *mi* and *eleh* are separate and the soul sits in the physical machine like some foreign element, the body could truly be described as a garment. Joseph left her holding this garment and tore himself away.

He said to himself, "This tidal wave of desire that I cannot resist does not come from within myself. It originates in my garment. If I give in to it, I am associating myself forever with the impersonal,

the standard and the not unique. I have to tear myself away from this garment. I have to run away as hard as I can from the notion that it represents me in any way." So he fled outside.

This flight outside had the effect of forcing the body into conforming to the dictates of the soul. The tidal wave of desire, totally impersonal and indifferent to the moral appearance of any situation, becomes sensitive to the nuances of character.

Thus when the sea saw the bones of Joseph, it parted. Just as the tidal wave of the body parts before the soul and synthesizes with it to form the name *Elohim*, so does the tidal wave of the sea.

How does this happen?

When the disparate elements of the holy name *Elohim* are fused into one, the physical world becomes imbued with the *kavod* of God. The tidal wave of physicality from which Joseph tore himself, when it was ready to drown his soul, is now itself forced to retreat before Joseph's bones, for his bones have become a repository of God's *kavod*.

The body in which *mi* and *eleh* have been successfully fused is a body that will live forever. It deserves to be cherished in the same manner as the soul. But this fusion is one that each of us has to create on our own.

Joseph told Jacob, "*Elohim* gave me these children Ephraim and Menashe here in Egypt. In them the two elements of *mi* and *eleh* of body and soul are perfectly fused. But the *eleh* element contained in them comes from Egyptian soil. In a descendant who does not fuse the two elements of

his being properly, the tidal wave of physicality will become unleashed with the full force of a Potiphar's wife."

What has the potential for the greatest revelation of *kavod* can be turned into its very opposite and become the source of idolatry, the very antithesis of God's *kavod*.



## The Precious Final Moments

The messenger came from Goshen and reported to Yosef, "Behold, your father is sick" (Genesis, 48:1). It would seem that this was a fairly commonplace message, especially regarding elderly people, but in actuality, it was a very remarkable statement, an unheard-of statement.

According to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, there had never been illness in the world before this time. Death never came as the culmination of a long illness. A person would be fit as a fiddle one moment and dead the next. He would just sneeze, and his soul would depart through his nostrils.

Yaakov, however, prayed to Hashem that people should become ill so that they should have some inkling that death is imminent. "Please do not take



my soul," he prayed, "before I have the opportunity to leave instructions for my children and my household."

Hashem accepted Yaakov's prayer. He became sick. And the messenger came to report to Yosef about the amazing thing that had happened in Goshen. "Behold, your father is sick." It was sensational news.

I once heard a radio newscaster comment on an air disaster, "Thank Heaven, they never knew what hit them. When a bomb goes off on an aircraft at thirty thousand feet, there is no time to think. You're just dead in an instant. They never had a chance to think, 'Yikes, I'm about to die.' They were spared the pain and the anguish of looking death in the face. Boom, and they were dead. Just like that."

Well, I suppose that is one way of looking at it, but it is not the Jewish way. The *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* describes the Jewish way. Terminal diseases may be painful, but at least they give a person a warning that he is about to depart from this world. He is forewarned that he must tie up the loose ends.

A person leaving this world must make a *cheshbon hanefesh*, taking spiritual stock of his life, what he has accomplished and what he has failed to accomplish. He must do *teshuvah* for his transgressions and shortcomings and prepare his soul for the next world. He must review all his outstanding obligations and make sure he has discharged them properly. He must leave instructions to his children and his household. He must make sure he is not leaving a mess for someone else to clean up. A lifetime of activity

calls for a lot of wrapping up. A person who is struck by a bus and never knows what hit him will never have the opportunity to bring his life to a fitting conclusion. He misses out on a very great blessing.

When the *Challenger* shuttle exploded, there was much speculation about whether the crew members were aware that they were about to die. When they finally found the tapes, they heard some of them say, "Uh oh!" This caused a great uproar. Their attorneys wanted to sue NASA for the additional trauma of their having known about the impending disaster.

"Does it necessarily follow," wrote a gentile columnist at the time, "that it would have been more merciful that death come so instantaneously that the final conscious emotion was a sense of exhilaration? Or does such an end rob a person of the right to reflect, even if only for a few precious moments, on those things that make life worth living?"

For those who believe that death is the end, blissful ignorance at the moment of death is perhaps preferable to a few moments of agony. But for those who believe in the immortality of the soul, in punishment and reward in the next world, in an eternal afterlife, a few precious moments of preparation are priceless indeed.

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