



What was Joseph's plan?

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Joseph & his Brothers

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

In analyzing Joseph's relationship with his brothers we must ask several salient questions which will help shed light on the entire sequence of events recited in the Torah.

We must first analyze the source of the brothers' hatred of Joseph. Joseph was their father's favorite since he was born the son of his old age. However, Joseph reinforced their resentment by telling his brothers the content of two dreams that he had. This fact indicated his arrogant nature. The dreams were obviously divinely inspired. However, we must understand why there were two dreams. Furthermore,

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Choosing Your Religion

Belief vs. Fact

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

This week I had a discussion with Lee, concerning the most fundamental of topics: choosing a religion.

Lee is Jewish, but has researched many other religions. The ideas we covered apply not only to Lee, but all Jews. Many times, one who is raised observant will not voice questions that might invite a harsh critique from teachers and Rabbis. But this is wrong, as it is only the question not asked, that is the poor question. Hebrew schools and Yeshivas fail our children – and

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Weekly Parsha

Vayigash

RABBI BERNIE FOX

“And Yisrael and all that was his set out and came to Be'er Sheva, and he slaughtered sacrifices to the God of his father Yitzchak. And Hashem said to

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Weekly Parsha

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Yisrael in visions of the night, and He said, "Yaakov, Yaakov!" And he said, "Here I am." And He said, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up, and Yosef will place his hand on your eyes." (Beresheit 46:1-3)

Yosef reveals his identity to his brothers and tells them to bring their father, their families and all of their possessions to Egypt. He will resettle them in Egypt and they will be saved from the ravages of the famine. The brothers return to Cana'an and they tell their father that they have found their lost brother Yosef and that he is the ruler of Egypt. Yaakov agrees to travel to Egypt and see Yosef.

Yaakov and his family come to Be'er Sheva. There Yaakov has a vision and Hashem speaks to him. Hashem reassures Yaakov that he need not fear going to Egypt. He tells Yaakov that in Egypt, Bnai Yisrael will become a great nation. He tells Yaakov that He will descend with him to Egypt and that He will bring him back to Cana'an.

Unkelus renders his Aramaic translation of the passage literally. Maimonides notes that this is unusual. One of the fundamental principles of the Torah is that Hashem is not a material being. This means that He does not have material form. Also, the characteristics of a material body and its behaviors and activities cannot be ascribed to Hashem. For example, movement and position are characteristics of a material body. It is not possible for a non-material body to move or have position. However, for the sake of lucidity, the Torah often uses such expression in relation to Hashem. Of course, it is not the intention of the Torah to suggest that Hashem is material. The Torah resorts to these expressions in order to communicate its message in a manner that is accessible to the common reader.

Unkelus goes to great lengths in his translation to avoid communicating any anthropomorphism – any suggestion that Hashem is

material. However, in this instance, Unkelus' translation characterizes Hashem as descending to Egypt and then bringing Yaakov, or his descendants, back to Cana'an. This is precisely the type of expression that Unkelus typically reworks in order to remove the seeming anthropomorphic connotation. Maimonides cites numerous instances in which Unkelus reworks similar phrases in order to remove the suggestion of anthropomorphism.

Let us consider one of these examples. In Sefer Shemot, Moshe tells Bnai Yisrael that they should prepare for revelation. He tells them that Hashem will descend upon Mount Sinai.[1] The expression "He will descend" is rendered by Unkelus as "He will reveal Himself."

Maimonides explains that we would expect Unkelus to rework our passages based upon the same principle. Rather than translating the passages literally, Unkelus should rework it to avoid the anthropomorphic suggestion.

Maimonides responds with a subtle but important distinction. He explains that the Torah introduces these passages by telling us that Hashem spoke to Yaakov in a vision. The subsequent passages are an exact description of the message Hashem delivered to Yaakov. Hashem said to Yaakov, "I will descend with you." Of course, Yaakov understood this

message in its proper manner – divorced of any anthropomorphic element. Unkelus sees no need to rework this phrase. Any reworking of the phrase would undermine the intent of the Torah to communicate to the reader the exact contents of the vision.

However, in instances in which the Torah is engaged in the narrative of events, Unkelus takes care to eliminate any anthropomorphic reference. Similarly, in Moshe's directions to the people, Unkelus reworks the narrative to eliminate the anthropomorphic suggestion.[2]

Nachmanides disagrees with Maimonides' position and raises numerous objections. Let us consider one of his objections. Earlier in Sefer Bereshit, Yaakov fled from his father's home and traveled to Charan. On his journey, he had a dream in which Hashem spoke to him.

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Targum Onkelos in German

Hashem told Yaakov, "I will be with you." [3] Unkelus reworks this phrase to "My word will be with you." Nachmanides notes that in this instance, the Torah introduced the prophecy by telling us that it occurred in a vision. According to Maimonides, there is no need for Unkelus to rework this phrase. It is part of a vision. Unkelus should have rendered the phrase literally.

Based on his objections Nachmanides comes to a completely different interpretation of Unkelus' intentions. Nachmanides suggests that we should compare the translation of our passage to the translation of Yaakov's earlier prophecy during his journey to Charan. In our passage, Unkelus describes Hashem Himself descending with Yaakov. In the earlier prophecy, Unkelus describes Hashem as assuring Yaakov that His word will be with him. Nachmanides suggests that these are very different ideas and assurances. There is a difference between Hashem Himself descending with Yaakov and His word accompanying him. Nachmanides does not elaborate on the exact distinction. He explains that the distinction can only be understood through Kabbalah. Although Nachmanides often includes Kabbalistic explanations in his commentary, he does not explain the meaning of these explanations.

Nachmanides explains that Unkelus' translation is not designed to avoid anthropomorphic suggestions as it includes many. Instead, it is designed to communicate the Kabbalistic interpretation of the passages. Specifically, Hashem's interactions with humanity and the material world vary. Some are more "intimate" – in the Kabbalistic sense – than others. Unkelus' translation is designed to communicate the "intimacy" of the interaction cited in each passage. [4]

Maimonides and Nachmanides differ in their understanding of Unkelus' fundamental objective in his translation of the Torah. Both agree that Unkelus is not solely concerned with providing a literal translation. They agree that other considerations motivated Unkelus to deviate from the literal translation. According to Maimonides, Unkelus' work is not a mere translation. It is a reworking to the Torah designed to present the text in a clear and accurate form. Because of this objective, he eliminates any anthropomorphic references. It is not the Torah's intent to suggest that Hashem is material. True to his objective, Unkelus reworks the text and presents a reworked version free of anthropomorphic references.

Nachmanides presents a radically different



Unkelos: Iraq, 1st half 11th century

interpretation of Unkelus' objective. According to Nachmanides, Unkelus' work is designed to incorporate an element of Kabbalistic scholarship into the text. It is a presentation of the Torah's text interwoven with this Kabbalistic element. In other words, according to Maimonides, Unkelus is clarifying the text. According to Nachmanides, he is elaborating on it.

This dispute has an interesting practical implication. The Talmud explains that we obligated to review the weekly portion each week. This review consists of reading each passage twice and the Targum – Unkelus' rendering – once. [5] Tosefot ask whether the Talmud's stipulation of Unkelus can be extended to other translations. For example, can one fulfill his obligation though studying the passages in an English translation? Tosefot and others conclude that the Talmud's requirement cannot be fulfilled with other translations. They offer an interesting explanation for their position. Other translations may occasionally provide some commentary on passages. However, Unkelus' work interprets various passages that are not possible to comprehend from the original text. [6]

According to Maimonides, this argument makes perfect sense. Unkelus provides an accurate and clear presentation of the material of the Torah. Another translation may not meet this standard. Therefore, the Talmud's specification of Unkelus cannot be extended to other translations.

However, according to Nachmanides, Tosefot should have presented an even stronger objection to other translations. They do not include a Kabbalistic element! One of the essential elements of Unkelus' work is not included in these other translations. ■

[1] Sefer Shemot 19:11.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 1, chapter 27.

[3] Sefer Beresheit 28:15.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 46:1.

[5] Mesechet Berachot 7b.

[6] Tosefot, Mesechet Berachot 7b.

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our high tuitions – since they do not include mandatory classes on Judaism’s proofs, and the disproof of all other religions. This ignorance places students in the precarious position of not knowing how to answer themselves, when they inevitably will ask, “Why should I be Jewish?”

The following is based on our dialogue last night:

Lee: So what is Judaism’s proof that it alone is Divinely given, that other religions don’t have?

Rabbi: Aren’t we really asking for a method of proof that will prove ALL history?

Lee: What do you mean?

Rabbi: I mean that the proof of Judaism must be some event in the past, right?

Lee: Right.

Rabbi: So we are seeking to verify that event?

Lee: Yes.

Rabbi: Then the method we use is a method that verifies history?

Lee: Yes.

Rabbi: OK, so we are in agreement that when seeking to validate Judaism’s claim to exclusive, Divine origin, we are in fact seeking to verify some historical event?

Lee: Yes.

Rabbi: So the individual, historical instances are not at question, but it is ALL history that requires some method for validation or disproof?

Lee: Yes.

Rabbi: So let’s leave out the issue of “religious obligation” that Torah observance devolves upon us, so as not to complicate the issue. Did you ever question whether Caesar existed, or do you affirm his historical validity without question?

Lee: I accept it.

Rabbi: Why?

Lee: I don’t know, but aren’t there documents proving his existence, and that country’s exclusive history?

Rabbi: There are. But aren’t there writings about Jesus as well? Are we to say that anything written testifies to the truth of the topic addressed by the writings? Surely we will contradict ourselves, since all religions have writings, yet, they all disagree with each other. Therefore, something in writing is of no proof that it reflects God’s will, or any real fact. God could not have said Christianity is the correct religion, and so is Judaism, and so is Islam.

Lee: OK, so how is Caesar proven to be a historical truth?

Rabbi: As you said, there are no other histories of Rome; no other accounts of a different leader during the years of Caesar’s reign; no other country that claims Caesar was THEIR emperor. Masses witnessed Caesar, and it’s not difficult to determine who Caesar was if you lived at that time, just as it is impossible to mistakenly say today that George Bush isn’t president. Do you think anyone back then could make such an error?

Lee: No.

Rabbi: Do you think thousands of people could unite to fabricate such a story?

Lee: I see your point.

Rabbi: So the two ingredients essential for proving any history as true are: 1) mass witnesses, and 2) a subject matter that no one could confuse. A history is false either due to purposeful corruption, or accidental corruption in its transmission. There is no other possibility for any history to be false. Do you agree?

Lee: OK.

Rabbi: Now, masses saw Caesar, and the question of who is emperor is not something people can mistake. Mass testimony removes any possibility of fabrication, since masses cannot possess equal motive to lie. (Any lie requires motive.) So when masses are found at an event, there cannot possibly be a common motive for thousands of people to lie, and suggest Caesar was emperor, when it was really someone else. Motive is subjective by nature, and therefore, masses cannot possibly share one motive. We thereby eliminate the possibility of purposeful corruption – fabrication. But you might ask whether Moses alone fabricated the story of Sinai, and convinced others of its supposed truth. To this I say as follows. If Sinai didn’t occur, we must explain the existence of the story we truly possess today. Moses would have had to approach some people, telling them what is quoted in the Torah: “Your eyes saw Sinai, the 10 Plagues, etc”. Now, since they did not witness the miracles Moses lies about, they will view Moses as foolish, and a liar. They will also most certainly NOT reject their known history, and replace it with Moses’ fabrication. In the end, Moses’ attempt will fail, and will not become world history. No one will pass it on as fact. But the very fact that Sinai IS world history, means that it could only have reached us as the exclusive history of the Jews...if it really occurred. No one can pull off such an attempt at revisionism. No people will replace what they know as true history, with an individual’s fabrica-

tion. People might transmit “beliefs”, but not facts witnessed by millions.

And since the topic is unmistakable, we thereby reject the possibility that everyone got it wrong, concerning who is the emperor, like our Bush example. So we also remove the possibility of accidental corruption of this story. This explains why there exists no other account of Rome’s emperor at that time...since Caesar in fact was emperor, beyond any doubt. And this is not based on the existence of writings or artifacts, but it is proved by the exclusive nature of the transmitted history containing these two ingredients.

It is these two factors – mass witnesses, and simple phenomena – that prove ANY history.

Now, these two factors are found in connection with the 10 miracles with which God plagued Egypt, the splitting of the Red Sea, the Manna, Miriam’s well...and Revelation at Sinai. Population at these events is estimated at 2.5 million Jews; since the number transmitted of men above 20 years of age is 600,000. Add another 600,000 women, men below 20, and all children, and you arrive at quite a large population.

This population – Jews – transmitted only one account of these many years, from Canaan, to Egypt, and to Sinai. This same population testified to hearing intelligent sounds from amidst a fiery Mount Sinai.

Fire is the one element in which no Earthly life may exist. The Jews realized the intelligence they witnessed is not of this world. It must be God.

Moses descended from the mountain with a Torah. And as he wrote more of the Torah about events and laws that took place after Sinai, Moses was endorsed as writing God’s true will, by the miracle of his face shining with light. Such a miracle was witnessed by masses, and God would not endorse Moses, had Moses been fabricating his own Torah.

We end up with a Torah that was witnessed to have been received by the masses, and the event being unmistakably a supernatural, intelligent Being, proved by its coexistence in fire.

No other religion has any claim to mass witnesses. In fact, they base themselves on belief and blind faith, precisely due to their lack of evidence. What’s worse is that Christianity upholds four contradictory Gospels, with conflicting events. Islam does not claim masses witnessed Mohammed’s miracle of flight. Examine any religion, and you will find their foundations are blind faith, and no mass witnesses. We conclude that the same method, with which we verify Caesar, is used to verify religion. It is the big lie,

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Values

which steers the world to feel religion is not subject to the litmus test of proof. Christianity is to blame for this acceptance. ANY matter we accept, should be done so only when proof validates it.

Lee: But maybe the Jews were brainwashed at what they saw at Sinai!

Rabbi: Would you say that about Caesar?

Lee: I never thought about that.

Rabbi: Why?

Lee: Why what?

Rabbi: Why do you suggest brainwashing in connection with Judaism, but NOT in regards to Caesar?

Lee: I don't know.

Rabbi: I will tell you why. It is because your acceptance of Caesar does not impose any change in your lifestyle, whereas your acceptance of Torah does. You don't want to have any limitations.

Lee: Maybe...

But you have more Christians transmitting Christianity, than Jews transmitting Judaism...so there you go! Christianity is true, based on your own words!

Rabbi: Think clearly...I did not say "any" transmission validates the story. I said a transmission that includes 1) mass witnesses, and 2) simple phenomena. Christianity is so much different! It transmits "belief", not witnessed events! Do you see that clearly?

Lee: I see. But when I was involved in Islam, their prayers were so nice. And what are you going to say...that most of the world is wrong?

Rabbi: Well, ask them! The major religions openly dispute each other's claims to possessing Gd's real religion. They say so! But yes, I say so too, and reasoning says so as well: most of the world is wrong.

Mass "acceptance" is just that: acceptance, and not validation if fact. Masses can prove that an event took place, but masses do not prove a "belief" to be valid. That only proves the belief is highly appealing. The incomparable difference being that belief is not regarding anything "real". I can believe Humpty Dumpty was real...but my belief – or the belief of millions – does not in any way affect what is real. Whereas masses, who attest to an "event", are validating something real.

But I wish to point out what you are doing. In a brief time span, you have shifted your arguments to various, unrelated claims. You must listen to

yourself as you talk. You are evading one line of argument, then another, in an effort to justify your rejection of Torah observance. This unveils your emotional rejection, not an intelligent rejection. You must be aware of your inner workings, and not fool yourself that you have made rational arguments. Had you truly desired to follow reason at this point, you would not quickly voice another argument, but you would have thought through your initial premise, and the response. You would have then agreed, and ventured down the path of exploring the results and ramifications of that belief. But when a person quickly voices a new argument, it displays a need to cover up a previous error, by attempting to be right about something else.

Do you want proof or not? Will you live by proof, or not?

Lee: Yes, I would love nothing more than proof. I just wish some miracle would happen so I would know Judaism is true.

Rabbi: But do you think God gave you reasoning, so you should ignore it, and live by miracles? What would you do if two miracles appeared to endorse conflicting religions?

Do you think a scientist in a laboratory will make a claim that a certain theory is true, if every time he writes it down, a lightning bolt flashes next to his window? Do you think that verifies a truth? What if the experiments conflicted with the sign of lightning: would he be correct to ignore the experiments' repeated results, or the lightning?

As Rabbi Reuven Mann once posed to another person: would you accept Jesus if he made a miracle, returning the Twin Towers to their location...but then tells you the Holocaust was a lie? Does a miracle have the ability to reject fact?

Lee: No...but that's one strong question!

Rabbi: Yes it is. But do you see the point, that once a fact is proven, other inexplicable phenomena have no affect on the proof? The proof remains as solid as before the other miracles took place.

Lee: Yes, I see that...but you just said that we accept Judaism based on the "miracle" of Sinai!

Rabbi: Again, think clearly. Does Sinai come to verify anything outside itself?

Lee: What do you mean?

Rabbi: I mean that in the case of someone miraculously causing the Twin Towers to reappear, we would not deny our senses...we see the Twin Towers. We don't know how he did it, but we see them standing there. However, his

following claim that the Holocaust was a lie is not concerning the Towers, but something other than the Towers. In that case, we don't say a miracle rejects known facts.

Now, in the case of Sinai, it is different. God did not say to ignore any facts with the miracles at Sinai. No, He said to simply accept your senses...AT Sinai. Nothing external to Sinai was being validated. So we accept that validation. Our eyes saw a fiery mountain, and heard intelligent sounds. But most significant, is that we heard God say "Moses, Moses, go tell the people etc." We heard intelligent words. Other miracles testify to a questionable phenomenon, but Sinai testifies to the Creator Himself. A tangent, but a primary one...let's return.

Sinai did not seek to reject known facts, so we accept it. But a miracle seeking to reject known facts, cannot do so. The Holocaust transpired, and no miracle can deny that. A miracle can only prove its miraculous nature, and nothing more.

This is a primary difference between other religions, and Judaism. Other religions attempt to gain belief, by lying about miracles that supposedly occurred hundreds of years before the lies were committed to writing. The very fact that Christianity's claims were not written at "the time" of the miracles is because no miracles took place. But in retrospect, Christianity's fabricators had an easier time getting others to believe those lies. And if in addition, Christian beliefs provide forgiveness for all your sins, then there is an added benefit if I believe in Jesus. But belief does not mean it is true. Miracles – recorded or otherwise – cannot affect reality and known facts.

But Judaism does not seek to gain belief in anything external through miracles. Rather, it simply seeks to validate itself. The miracle is for itself, and no other purpose. Maimonides teaches the lesson in his Mishne Torah (Yesoday HaTorah, chapter VIII) that once we were convinced of Sinai, no other miracle could deny that reality. And all other prophets were not believed to possess God's word based on their miracles alone, but based on their upholding of Moses Torah.

Judaism clearly differs with all other religions as the only religion possessing proof of its Divine origin; the only religion that demands proof for all our actions and beliefs. ■

Do you know someone who might benefit from this dialogue? Email this document to him or her: <http://www.mesora.org/jewishtimes279.pdf>

the brothers' response to each dream was different. The first dream was concerning the bundles of wheat. The brothers' response to this dream was continued hatred. The second dream concerning the constellations evoked a different response; the brothers were jealous while Jacob heeded this dream.

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

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

At the outset, an important footnote throughout the entire ordeal must be examined. The brothers, during their entire encounter with Joseph, did not recognize him, nor suspect that the Viceroy could be Joseph, despite their intimate knowledge of him. This incongruity could be explained because of the very nature of their sin. They miscalculated Joseph's potential for greatness. They viewed him as a vain and arrogant person. Accordingly, they felt by selling him into slavery, it would ensure that Joseph would not be the mentor. They felt that such an egotistical and vain person would



Joseph reveals his identity

succumb to the life of the physical. They thought the support and security of his father and family was essential and without it, he would desert the tradition. Therefore, the Medrash tells us that when they entered Egypt they looked for Joseph in the houses of ill repute. They never imagined nor appreciated Joseph's true intellectual conviction and ability to elevate himself to a higher level. This essentially was their "chate", sin. They misjudged his abilities and failed to realize that he was still a child at the time they passed judgment, and capable of change. Therefore, this image was still in their mind and prevented them from ever imagining that Joseph was the Viceroy.

When analyzing the entire sequence of events commencing with the brothers' descent into Egypt, and their meeting with Joseph and his ultimate revelation of his identity, one gets a rather puzzled picture. It leaves an impression of a rather prolonged, detached series of events without any type of logical nexus. Furthermore, many of Joseph's actions seem petty. When he recognizes his brothers he remembers his dreams and he responds by accusing them of being spies. Why didn't he reveal his identity to his brothers immediately? How come Joseph continues to place his

brothers through a series of ordeals? The most encompassing question and perhaps the most disturbing, is once Joseph had the ability, why didn't he communicate with his father and tell him of his well-being. Surely he would have spared Jacob undue suffering.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Letters



Letters

from our

READERS



“Our” Bodies?

Reader: My wife and I are residents in a Jewish retirement community. We are preparing funeral instructions, and although we have been members of a Conservative synagogue most of our lives we are seriously considering cremation instead of burial. I would appreciate your comments on the most recent Halacha or other positions on cremation. Thank you for your response.

Mesora: Cremation violates Torah laws. Rabbi Reuven Mann explained that it is derived from the verse "for you shall surely bury him on that day" and the Oral Law also forbids it. Thus, burial is the Torah way, not cremation. Furthermore, God owns our bodies, and following His burial rites is a no-compromise situation. Conversely, cremation – or any Torah violation in connection with our bodies – displays our false sense that our bodies are ours to do with as we please. But in fact, our bodies are "on loan".

We all must answer to Him when we die. Certainly, we must not violate His word via cremation AS we die, so close to coming before Him in judgment. ■

Creation vs. Formation

Beth: Rabbi, I have a translation / interpretation question. Isaiah 45:6,7 says: "In order that those (people) shall know, from the east of the sun and her west, that there is nothing but Me, I am God and there is no other. Forming light and creating darkness, making peace and creating evil – I am God doing all these things."

God did not "create" darkness, but He created something positive, light. Subsequent to its creation, its removal is what we term darkness. In that sense, God created darkness. Similarly, hunger cannot be created, but a stomach and nerves can be created, which, when empty, will sense hunger. This explains, as Maimonides teaches, why the term "yatzar" is applied only to light and peace in our verse, for these are real creations. (See the Hebrew of the verse) But darkness and evil are termed "bara", which does not imply positive creation, rather, a causal relationship. God is the creator of darkness, in as much as He created light with the ability for it to be diminished. I thought that "bara" meant "he created (ex nihilo)." So I was very surprised by your article. And confused, too.

If "bara" does not imply positive creation, rather, a causal relationship, then how would we understand Breishit 1:1? I mean, what did

God "yatzar" that established a causal relationship with ha-shamayim and ha'aretz? What THING did God "yatzar" such that - in that THING's absence or diminishment - we perceive ha-shamayim and ha'aretz? Put another way, in what respect do we consider ha-shamayim and ha'aretz to be a lacking of some THING?

Mesora: "Bara" (created) refers to that which God created ex nihilo – from nothing. Therefore, in the Torah, the heavens, Earth, and man's soul are referred to as "bara", created from nothing. But man's instinctual portion - "nefesh chaim" (Gen. 2:7) - and other formations are referred to as "yatzar", to mold from existing matter.

Maimonides states (Guide, Book II chap. 30) that "bara" is used when referring to creation ex nihilo. But also – as Isaiah states – when referring to darkness. Maimonides says that darkness is the absence of something...i.e., light. Thus, bara is appropriately used to refer to the "creation" of darkness, as it too – just like ex nihilo – refers to God's creation, when He is not relating to any real existence.

When God created the universe, He was not relating to anything yet in existence, just as when He "creates" darkness. Darkness is not a real existence. But when referring to God's acting upon something 'already' in existence, the term yatzar is used, describing a "molding" of that which already exists. Thus, light was "yatzar" – as Maimonides teaches – as it is an accident in an already existing body. Light may be correctly viewed as type of color...albeit much more intense than typical colors. Color is perceived by light emanating from any surface, and reaching our eyes. Thus, color and light are "yatzar", as they are actions upon an already existing body. ■

“Heart” & “Soul”

Reader: When R' Saadia Gaon in his Sefer Emunos V'deyos talks about the soul and says that it is seated in the heart and says what the soul is made of which sounds like its a physical entity, my question is we know the soul is not a physical entity so what does R' Saadia mean?

Mesora: In the Shema prayer, the Torah says man must love God with all your "heart" and with all your "soul". Perhaps God's use of the heart separate from the soul, is as Rashi teaches; the heart is a metaphor for the two halves of man: his intellect (soul) and his instincts. So loving God with "all" your heart, refers to the two halves of man. With all your "soul" Rabbi Akiva teaches, is that even if our soul – or life – is to be taken, we must still love God. So the soul is referred to as part of the heart, and also as an independent reference in loving God with all your soul. The former is the license for Saadia Gaon to refer to the heart as the 'seat' of the soul, since it refers to both: the soul and the instincts. But truly, the soul is not physical, but is merely dependent upon a functioning heart to operate on Earth. Thus, heart is directly associated with the soul. ■

Letters

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Kidney Needed *(Reprinted from an email list)*

I am writing to appeal to all of you to help me with the following two items. My dad is in desperate need of a kidney transplant and I need everyone's help. One please keep Ephraim be Esther in your tfillot and if you say thillim please keep him in mind. The next item is harder and I am asking your help to post in shul or community email message boards. He needs a kidney donor with type A or O blood for a transplant. If you know of anyone who wants to donate a kidney or have any information at all that could help please contact me asap. The recipient will pay all expenses and lost wages associated with the donation. Please distribute this information as word of mouth is the best networking. I can be reached 24 hours a day by email or at any of the numbers below. Tizku lmitsvos.

–Marc Hoschander

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