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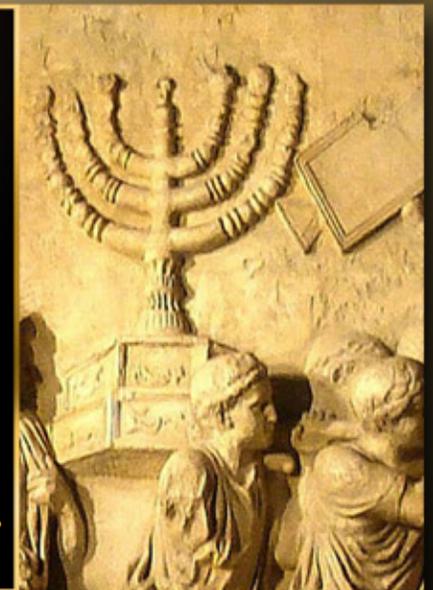
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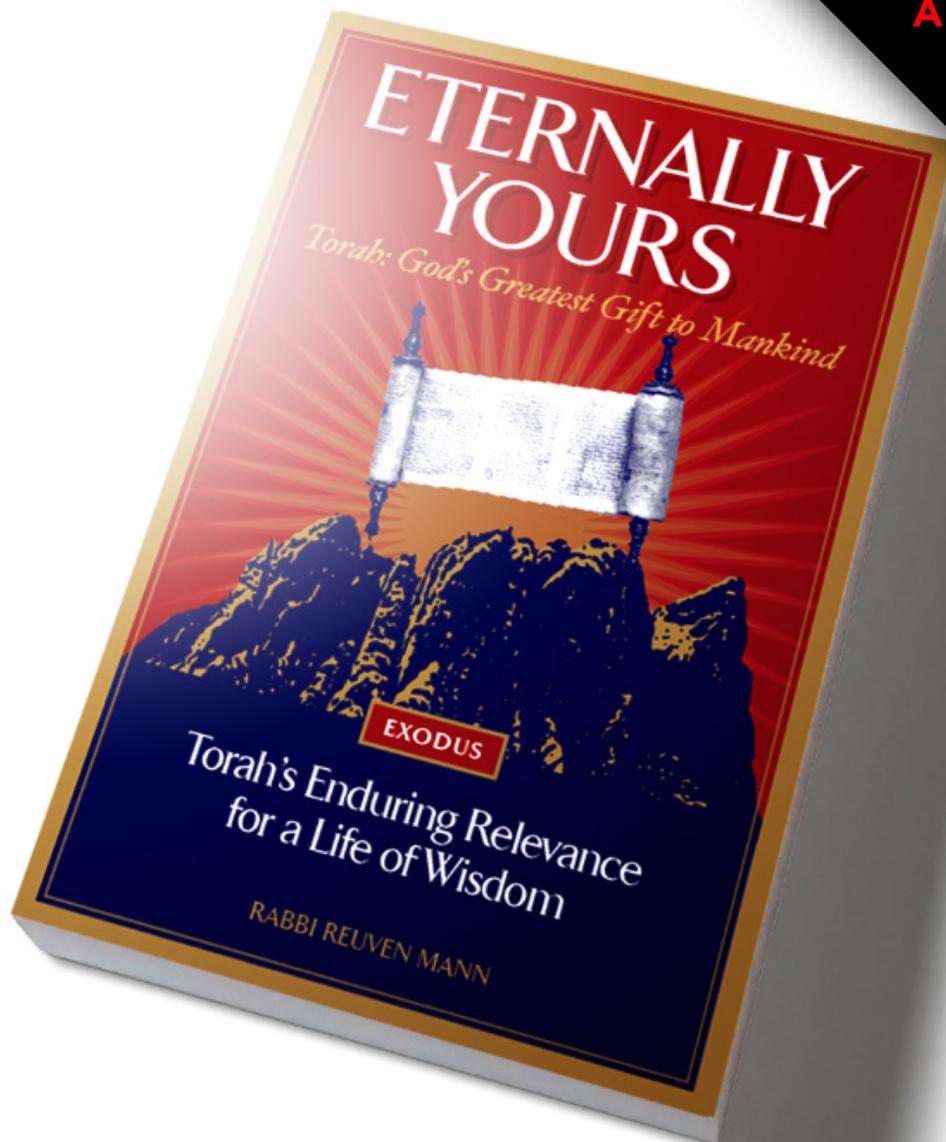
the Ancient Letter of Chanuka

Found in an ancient Greek siddur and recently translated, the Rabbis refer to Megilas Antiochos as a "precious letter."



A NEW BOOK BY

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Exodus, the 2nd of the Five Books of Moses, is one of the most fascinating and inspiring stories ever written. It describes the formation of a unique and eternal People, from their cruel enslavement by King Pharaoh to their miraculous redemption, and emergence as a nation via a public Revelation on Mt. Sinai. The themes in this Book are eternal and applicable to every time and situation. Throughout history downtrodden Peoples, identified with the oppressed Jews and composed inspiring hymns which depicted Moses confronting Pharaoh and commanding him to “Let my People go!” The purpose of this book, “Eternally Yours” is to examine the underlying ideas contained in Exodus. My governing premise is that there is deep wisdom hidden beneath the surface which if properly apprehended will enlighten our lives. I analyze the emotional forces at work in the drama and this yields new insights into human psychology with great practical consequences for our understanding of the dynamics of social

interactions. It also provides a deeper insight into the phenomenon of anti-Semitism and demonstrates that the pattern depicted in Exodus has recurred many times in history. This contains important lessons for confronting this problem in our time. The analyses and resolutions presented in this book lead to meaningful conclusions that are relevant to a deeper understanding of the challenges we face today as individuals and a society. My hope is that the book will enhance the reader’s appreciation of the Bible’s stories and that he will come to regard it as a source of enlightenment, enjoyment and inspiration. While it is written from the perspective of an Orthodox Rabbi, I firmly believe that people of all faiths and backgrounds who have an interest in the Bible will find it useful and gratifying. It contains no religious preaching, only a search for and analysis of, the eternal wisdom of the Book of Exodus.

Rabbi Reuven Mann

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CHANUKA

TRANSLATED BY RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

English Translation

MEGILAS ANTIOCHOS

Megillas Antiochos was found in an old edition of a siddur printed in Solonika, Greece. Otzar HaTfilos refers to it as a "precious letter."

1. And it was in the days of Antiochos, king of Greece, a great, mighty king was he, and he was strong in his reign and all kings listened to him. 2. And he conquered many cities and mighty kings, and he destroyed their palaces and their temples he burned with fire, and their men he imprisoned in jails. 3. From the days of Alexander the king, there arose no king like him on all sides of the river. 4. And he built a great city on the sea shore to be his house of kingdom, and Antiochos called the city by his name. 5. And also his second in command Bagris built another city next to it and Bagris called it by his name, and so is its name until this day. 6. In the twenty third year of his reign, it was the two hundred and thirteenth year of the building of the Temple, he gave face to ascend to Jerusalem. 7. And he answered and he said to his officers, "Do you not know that there is the Jewish people in Jerusalem amongst us? 8. To our god they do not sacrifice, and our religion they do not practice and the king's decrees they forsake, to do their religion. 9. And they also hope for the day of the dethroning of the kings and rulers and they say, "When will our King rule the seas and dry land, and the entire world will be given to our hand?"

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10. It is not honorable to the kingdom to leave them be on the face of the earth.

11. And now let us come and we will ascend on them and nullify their treaty that was cut with them concerning Sabbath, the new Month and circumcision. And the matter was good in the eyes of his officers and in the eyes of his entire army. 12. At that time, Antiochos the king arose and he sent Nikanor his second with a great army and many people and they came to the city of Judah, to Jerusalem. 13. And they slaughtered a great slaughter and built an altar in the Temple in the place where the God of Israel said to His servants, His prophets "Where I will cause to dwell My manifested presence eternally", in that place, they slaughtered the pig and they brought its blood to the sanctified courtyard. 14. And as this occurred, when Yochanan son of Mattisyahu the High Priest heard these doings occurred, he was filled with anger and rage, and the countenance of his face changed, and he counseled in his heart what should be done on this. 15. And then Yochanan son of Mattisyahu made himself a sword two spans long, one span wide, covered under his clothing. 16. And he came to Jerusalem and stood in the gate of the king, and he called to the gatekeepers and he told them "I am Yochanan son of Mattisyahu, I have come to come before Nikanor." 17. And then the gatekeepers and watchers came and told him the High priest of the Jews stands in the opening, and Nikanor answered and said to them, "Let him surely enter." 18. And then Yochanan was brought in before Nikanor and Nikanor answered and said to Yochanan, "Are you one of the rebels that rebels against the king and desires not the peace of his kingdom?" 19. And Yochanan answered before Nikanor and said, "I am he, now I come before you, that which you wish I will do." 20. And Nikanor answered and said to Yochanan, "If as my will you will do, take a pig and slaughter it on the altar and robe in the king's clothing and ride of the king's horses, and as one of the kings beloved you will be."

21. And as Yochanan listened, he responded a thing, "My master, I fear from the children of Israel, perhaps they will hear I have done so and they will stone me with rocks. 22. Now let all men leave from before you, perhaps they will make the matter known." Then, Nikanor caused all men to leave from before him. 23. At that

moment, Yochanan son of Mattisyahu lifted his eyes to the heavens and assembled his prayer before his God and he said, "My God and the God of my fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, please do not give me into the hand of this uncircumcised, because if he will kill me, he will go and praise in the house of Dagon his god, and say "My god has given him to my hand." 24. At that moment, he stepped towards him three steps and plunged the sword into his heart, and he threw that corpse into the sanctified courtyard. 25. Before the God of heaven, Yochanan answered and he said, "My God, do not place on me sin that I have killed in the sanctified (area), now, so also give all the people that come with him to pain Judah and Jerusalem." 26. Then went out Yochanan son of Mattisyahu on that day and warred with the people and slaughtered in them a great slaughter. 27. The number of the slain that he slayed on that day was seventy two thousand seven hundred that were killed these to these. 28. On his return they built a pillar on his name and called it "Maccabee Killed the Mighty". 29. And it was that king Antiochos heard that his second in command Nikanor was killed, it grieved him much, and he sent to bring Bagris the wicked that mislead his people. 30. And Antiochos answered and said to Bagris, "Do you not know, have you not heard what the children of Israel have done? They killed my army and looted my camp and my officers?"

31. Now, on their money you are trusted or their houses are yours. Come, and ascend upon them and nullify the treaty which was cut with them (by) their God, Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision. 32. Then Bagris the wicked and all his camp came to Jerusalem and slaughtered in them a great slaughter and decreed a complete decree on Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision. 33. When this occurred that the matter of the king was urgent, there was found a man who circumcised his son and they brought the man and his wife and they hung him in front of the child. 34. And also the woman who bore the son, after her husband died and circumcised him at eight days, she went up to the walls of Jerusalem and her circumcised son in her hands. 35. And she answered and said, "To you, Bagris the wicked, you intend to nullify from us the treaty that was cut with us, the treaty of our fathers will not be nullified from us, Sabbath, the New Moon and circumcision from our

children's children, it will not be removed." 36. And she dropped her son to the ground, and she fell after him and they both died together. And many of the children of Israel that did similarly in those days, and they did not veer from the treaty of their fathers. 37. At that time, the children of Israel said, "These to these, let us go and rest in the cave, lest we desecrate the Sabbath day, and they slandered them before Bagris. 38. Then Bagris the wicked sent men girded for battle and they came to the opening of the cave and said to them, "Come out to us, eat of our bread and drink of our wine and our actions you shall do." 39. And the children of Israel answered, "These to these, "we remember that which God commanded us on Mount Sinai, 'Six days you shall work, and do all your labor, and on the seventh day rest'. Now it is better for us that we die in this cave than desecrating the Sabbath day." 40. When this happened that the Jews did not come out to them, they brought wood and burnt it at the opening of the cave and there died like a thousand men and women.

41. Afterwards, there came out five sons of Mattisyahu, Yochanan and his four brothers and they warred with the people and slaughtered a great slaughter and drove them to the isles of the sea because they trusted in the God of heaven. 42. Then Bagris entered one ship and fled to king Antiochos and with him were men, escapees of the sword. 43. And Bagris answered and said to king Antiochos, "You the king, placed a command to nullify from the Jews Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision, a great deceit and rebellion in its midst. 44. That when there went all the people and nations and languages, they could not defeat the five sons of Mattisyahu. From lions they are stronger, and from eagles they are more swift, and from bears they are more quick. 45. Now king, I offer you good counsel, and do not war with few men, for if you war, you will be embarrassed in the eyes of all kings. 46. Therefore, write and send books in all cities of your kingdom, that there come officers of war and not leave one of them, and also elephants wearing armour with them." 47. And the matter was good with king Antiochos, and he sent books to all cities of his reign, and there came officers of all the people and kingdoms, and also elephants wearing armour came with them. 48. A second time Bagris the wicked arose and came to Jerusalem, he broke the wall, and he cut off the water supply, and he

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broke in the Temple thirteen breaches and also from the stones he broke until they were like dust and he thought in his heart and said, "This time I will not be overtaken because of the numbers of my army and might of my hand". But the God of heaven did not think so. 49. And when the five sons of Mattisyahu heard, there arose and came to Mitzpeh Gilead, that were there the remnant of the house of Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet. 50. They decreed a fast, and sat on ashes to seek out mercy from before God of heaven.

51. Then there fell good counsel in their hearts, Judah the firstborn, Simon the second, the third Yochanan, the fourth Yonasan, the fifth Elazar. 52. And their father blessed them and so he said, "Judah my son, I liken you to Judah son of Jacob who was equated to a lion. 53. Simon my son, I liken you to Simon son of Jacob who killed the inhabitants of Shechem. 54. Yochanan my son, I liken you to Avner son of Ner, officer of the army of Israel. Yonasan my son, I liken you to Yonasan son of Saul, who killed the Philistine people. 55. Elazar my son, I liken you to Pinchas son of Elazar who was jealous for his God and saved the children of Israel. 56. On this, there went out the five sons of Mattisyahu on that day, and warred with the people, and slaughtered in them a great slaughter, and there was killed from them Judah. 57. At that moment when the sons of Mattisyahu saw that Judah was killed, they returned and they came to their father. 58. And he said to them, "Why have you returned?"

And they answered and they said, "On account that our brother was killed who was equated to all of us." 59. And Mattisyahu their father answered and said to them, "I will go out with you and I will fight with the people, lest the house of Israel perish, and you are frightened on your brother." 60. And Mattisyahu went out on that day with his sons and fought with the people.

61. And God of heaven gave all the mighty of the nations into their hands. And they slaughtered a great slaughter, all who seized the sword, and all who drew the bow, officers of war and the seconds in command, there was not left one remnant, and there fled the rest of the people to the cities of the sea. 62. And Elazar was involved in killing the elephants and he was submerged by the chariots of the elephants, and when they returned, they looked for him among the living and among the dead, and they could not find him. And afterwards they found him that he was submerged by the chariots of the elephants. 63. And the children of Israel were gladdened that there was given to their hands their enemies. From them they burned with fire and from them they pierced with the sword, and from them they hung on trees. 64. And Bagris the wicked that misled his people, the children of Israel burned him with fire. 65. And then, Antiochos the king heard that Bagris the wicked was killed and all officers of war with him, he entered into a ship and fled to the cities of the sea, and it was that each place he came to

there, they mocked him and called him "the runaway". 66. Afterwards, the children of the Hasmoneans came to the temple, and they built the broken gates and they closed the breaches, and purified the courtyard from the casualties and from the impurities. 67. And they searched for pure olive oil to light the candelabrum, and they did not find but one canister that had the seal of the ring of the High Priest and they knew that it was pure, and it contained a measurement to light for one day. 68. And God of heaven Who causes to dwell His name there, gave a blessing and they lit from it eight days. 69. Therefore there established the children of the Hasmoneans a fulfillment, and they forged a law, and the children of Israel with them as one, to make these eight days days of drinking and happiness as the appointed days written in the Torah, and to light on them lights to make known what was done to them (by) the eternal God of heaven. 70. And on them, one may not eulogize, nor to decree fast days, or have a fast, except if it was accepted on it prior to this and pray before their God.

71. But the Hasmoneans and their children and their brothers they did not decree on them to nullify service of work. And from that time, there was no name to the kingdom of Greece. 72. And there received the kingdom, the children of the Hasmoneans and their grandchildren from that time until the destruction of the Temple two hundred and six years. 73. Therefore, the children of Israel from that day in all their exiles guard these days and call them days of drinking and gladness from the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, eight days. 74. From that time and eternally, there should not be removed from them, that were in their Temple, priests, Levites and their wise men who established upon them and upon their grandchildren eternally."

Other prayer books add these verses:

"And these days, they arose and accepted on themselves and on their children and on their grandchildren eternally, the priests, Levites and wise men that were in the temple, and they were not removed forever. The God that did with them a miracle and a wonder, He should do with us miracles and wonders and sustain with us the verse that was written as the days of your Exodus from the land of Egypt, I display wonders, Amen. ■





PARSHA

Powerplay

PHARAOH & JOSEPH

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Part I

In Genesis 41 we read the story of Joseph's ascension to the second highest position in Egypt. Pharaoh had a disturbing dream which his magicians could not interpret to his satisfaction. Joseph, after being released from prison, successfully interpreted Pharaoh's dream. We must wonder what it was that convinced Pharaoh that Joseph's interpretation was right? How did his interpretation differ from that of the magicians?

Let us look closely at the Biblical presentation of that event. When Joseph was first introduced to Pharaoh, Pharaoh said to him, "*I heard of you that you can understand a dream to interpret it*" (*Ibid.* 15). Joseph replied with the word "biladai" meaning, it is not I. He continued: "*God will answer Pharaoh's peace.*" Targum Onkelos translates "*from before God will be answered the peace of Pharaoh.*" What did Joseph mean by his strange response, "*It is not !?*" Was it not he and only he that could interpret this dream? Was this some kind of false humility? I believe Joseph was giving Pharaoh an important message in his response. Pharaoh was steeped in Egyptian mysticism. Egypt was the center of civilization at that time and it was also the center of religious occultism. Pharaoh was searching, as the primitive mind does, for the mystical person who has magical powers that give him exclusive access to certain information. This, Pharaoh expressed in verse 15. Joseph replied "*biladai, It is not I,*"—I have no special powers. True, I have knowledge, but this knowledge is objective; anyone can attain it if they pursue it properly. There is nothing supernatural in my nature. He further stated, this knowledge stems from the Creator as all knowledge does; "*from before God will be answered...*" Joseph had taught Pharaoh of the true humility that comes with recognition of God's infinite wisdom.

Joseph was setting the stage for the message he was about to give

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Pharaoh. It is a premise of the Torah that prophecy is the highest form of human knowledge. This explains how Moses or Abraham could argue with God; something which seems preposterous to the modern religious mind. Modern religious man has an infantile notion of prophecy. He views it mystically. He expects the one receiving prophecy to be in a state of subordination and total submission. The Torah views it as an intellectual experience. Man's mind is fully engaged. The prophet must understand his mission. He must argue as a student would with his teacher in an attempt to understand God's word. It is not submission, but active investigation that is proper in prophecy, as in all areas of knowledge. The difference between the prophet and the ordinary person is that the prophet, through the medium of prophecy, has access to a wider range of phenomena than the ordinary person. When one reaches a certain level of knowledge one can distinguish between a prophetic dream and other dreams. One can further interpret prophetic dreams. The prophets had to interpret their prophecies which they received by way of dreams (see Zechariah 4:2-6). This was done through knowledge—not mystical powers.

Joseph proceeded to interpret the

dreams and then said to Pharaoh what must have struck him as very strange: *"And now let Pharaoh seek out a man of understanding and knowledge and set him over the land of Egypt"* (Ibid. 33). Joseph continued to present his plan for a national rationing system (Ibid. 34-36). This idea contained a whole new philosophic outlook. Pharaoh's magicians had interpreted his dreams either as a curse or a blessing. This is the way the primitive mind relates to God. Joseph taught Pharaoh a new approach. He explained to him that God doesn't bless or curse man, he merely places certain situations before him. The blessing or the curse emanates from what man does with his situation: *"Out of the mouth of the most High do not come evil and good"* (Lamentations 3:38). Man has free will and can create either good or evil. The Rabbis tell us the magicians had told Pharaoh, *"You will have seven daughters; you will bury seven daughters"*—things he could do nothing about. Joseph said to Pharaoh whether this will be a blessing or a curse depends totally on you. If you don't act rationally and wisely, it will be a curse: you and your people will starve. If you act with wisdom, the famine can be converted into a blessing. If a country has plentiful supplies of food during a famine, it has a distinct advantage over others.

The famine held great potential for prosperity for Egypt. The key was using wisdom and knowledge in setting up a rationing system, as well as researching the best practices for storing vast supplies of grain for an elongated duration.

Joseph taught Pharaoh an entirely different philosophy: God gave man a mind and charged him with using it for his own welfare. He removed Pharaoh from the primitive attitude of propitiating the gods and waiting to be saved. The Torah does not take the space in its narrative to describe everything that took place in a given situation, as we see, for instance in its description of the sale of Joseph (Ibid. 37:23-31) and the further statement of the brothers concerning this event (Ibid. 42:21).

We can assume the conversation between Pharaoh and Joseph was a lengthy one and covered many topics. Pharaoh was overwhelmed by this man who had attained such a high level of knowledge. He would certainly be interested in his opinions on religion where Joseph had already impressed him. We can be quite sure that Joseph taught Pharaoh the true idea of God and the basic Principles of the Noahide philosophy. An interesting corroboration of this is that

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Pharaoh used the same adjectives to describe Joseph that the Torah says people will use to describe the Jewish nation when they hear the wisdom of the Torah system (Deuteronomy 4:6) *“Therefore keep and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, that shall hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’”* These two adjectives—Navon and Chachom; understanding and wise—are found together in this form in only these two places in the Torah.

Joseph reached Pharaoh as none of his magicians could by giving him a whole new Weltanschauung. At the close of the meeting, Pharaoh turned to his servants and aptly stated, *“Is there to be found such a one as this; a man in whom is the spirit of God?”* (Ibid. 41:38), “a man”—not a magician or sorcerer, who partakes of “the spirit of God”—God’s knowledge. He then turned to Joseph and proclaimed him to possess the greatest wisdom and understanding. Pharaoh was converted from the worship of the mystical and occult to the worship of God through knowledge and understanding. Joseph had succeeded in winning over to the Noahide philosophy the most powerful figure in the ancient civilized world.

Part II

Did Pharaoh retain his enthusiastic first impressions of Torah ideas? Was he a good Ben Noah student of Joseph? From the prima facie text of the Bible we have no way of knowing. Here, the midrash comes in, and by going just beneath the surface, it uncovers an interesting sequel to the Pharaoh/Ben Noah episode. In Genesis 41:54,55 we read, *“And the seven years of famine commenced as Joseph had said: and the famine was in all the Lands; but in the Land of Egypt there was bread. And all (the people of) the Land of Egypt hungered; and the nation cried to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all of Egypt, ‘Go to Joseph what he says to you you shall do.’”* On this last verse, Rashi—the

ingenious selector of midrash—quotes a strange midrashic commentary. Rashi explains that Pharaoh gave the people the order to do what Joseph says: *“Because Joseph has told them (the Egyptians) to be circumcised, and when they came before Pharaoh and told him what Joseph had bid them to do he said to them, ‘Why didn’t you store grain yourselves? Did he not publicly announce that the famine is coming?’ They said to him ‘We gathered much but it has rotted.’ He said to them, ‘If so, whatever he says to you, you shall do. He laid a decree on the produce and it rotted; what will happen if he lay a decree on us that we should die!’”*

A midrash must be unravelled. If it is done properly it affords great insight; if done improperly it sounds silly and foolish. A properly analyzed midrash always gives insight into the text itself. There are several questions we must ask about this midrash: 1) Why did Joseph wish the Egyptians to be circumcised? 2) Why did Pharaoh expect the people to preserve their own grain: wasn’t that Joseph’s task? 3) What did Pharaoh mean when he stated that Joseph could decree death for the Egyptians? 4) Where does the midrash find any allusion to all this in the text itself?

Let us tackle the last question first. The midrash found great difficulty in verse 55. The reason is clear. Why should the Egyptians go to Pharaoh when they hungered? Had it not been established over seven years earlier that Joseph—the Prime minister of Egypt—would head the rationing program? It would seem natural that the Egyptians should turn to Joseph. Verse 55 is not necessary: *“And all (the people of) the Land of Egypt hungered; and the nation cried to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all of Egypt, ‘Go to Joseph what he says to you you shall do.’”*

The midrashic scholars’ sensitivity to the Biblical text alerted them to the subtle meaning of this verse. In this verse Pharaoh said, *“What he (Joseph) says to you you shall do.”* In fact, it was not for them to do but for Joseph to do as we read in verse 56: *“and Joseph opened all the places that had*

food in them and sold grain to the Egyptians.” Verse 55 stands out like a sore thumb in the smooth Biblical narrative.

Let us try to reconstruct the Biblical events through the eyes of the midrashic interpretation. Pharaoh was at first overwhelmed by Joseph’s ideas. People are overwhelmed by experiences. But these effects are usually short lived. Ideas create a more lasting impression, but their effects as well often wane with time. When the chief butler introduced Joseph to Pharaoh he used disparaging terms in his recommendation (41:12) *“youth,” “Hebrew,” “slave.”* He was ambivalent toward Joseph. He wished to gain favor in Pharaoh’s eyes for recommending Joseph and helping Pharaoh resolve his problems. He didn’t wish to see Joseph—a stranger, a Hebrew and a slave—placed in a high position. He punctuated his praise for Joseph with pejoratives. Hebrews were known to the ancient Egyptians as God’s blessing to Abraham, to make him renowned had been fulfilled. His philosophy and his many followers were known throughout the civilized world. Egyptians didn’t especially like Hebrews as it is stated (Genesis 43:32) *“because the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews since this was an abomination to Egypt.”* (The Hebrews often ate foods the Egyptians venerated and worshipped, such as sheep.)

In a story everything seems simple. In real life, things are more complex. The Bible is not a storybook. We can be sure that the chief butler was not the only one that didn’t wish to see Joseph, a stranger, given the high office of Prime Minister of Egypt. Heads of State are often envious and greedy. There were, without doubt, many that felt they were more deserving of high office than Joseph. Such people would not take kindly to being subordinated to a total stranger. They would apply pressure on Pharaoh for his giving such prominence to Joseph. A king, no matter how powerful, must (if he is wise) try to satisfy his subjects. Pharaoh, after being

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enthralled by Joseph and enthusiastically appointing him to the highest office in the land, found himself in a dilemma. Pressures from his advisers and officers mounted. He couldn't rescind his appointment of Joseph as this would be an indication of fallibility and weakness and a breakdown of his authoritative image. As Achashverosh put it, *"Because the writing which is already written in the King's name and sealed with the King's ring cannot be revoked"* (*Esther 8:8*). This was especially true in Egypt: a land where the king was akin to a god.

Pharaoh did the next best thing. While retaining Joseph in his position, he slowly shifted the focus away from him. He tried to minimize the Egyptians' dependence on Joseph. He encouraged them to make use of the information Joseph had given them and store their own grain. Joseph retained his position officially, but his position grew obsolete.

Brilliant statesman that he was, Joseph was well aware of the implications of what was going on. He knew he had to struggle to maintain his position and perhaps even his life. He knew that in a problem it is the quantitative factor that is most significant. If one cannot obliterate a problem, one must at least mitigate it. Being a person with deep psychological insight, he was troubled by the Egyptians' inability to relate to him. He knew—as recent psychoanalytical investigations have disclosed—that there is an unconscious identification barrier between the circumcised and the uncircumcised. The incident of Shechem (Genesis 34), confirms this: *"But in this we will consent to you, if you will be as we are that every male of you be circumcised"* (*Ibid. 15*). And again, *"Only on this condition will the men consent to us to dwell with us, to be one people, if every male among us be circumcised as they are circumcised"* (*Ibid. 22*). The people of Shechem consented to be circumcised: not for religious purposes but for purposes of identification—*"to be one people."* Joseph could not totally rid himself of his status as a stranger, but he could remove a part of the problem—a great obstacle toward identification with him—by

having all Egyptians circumcised.

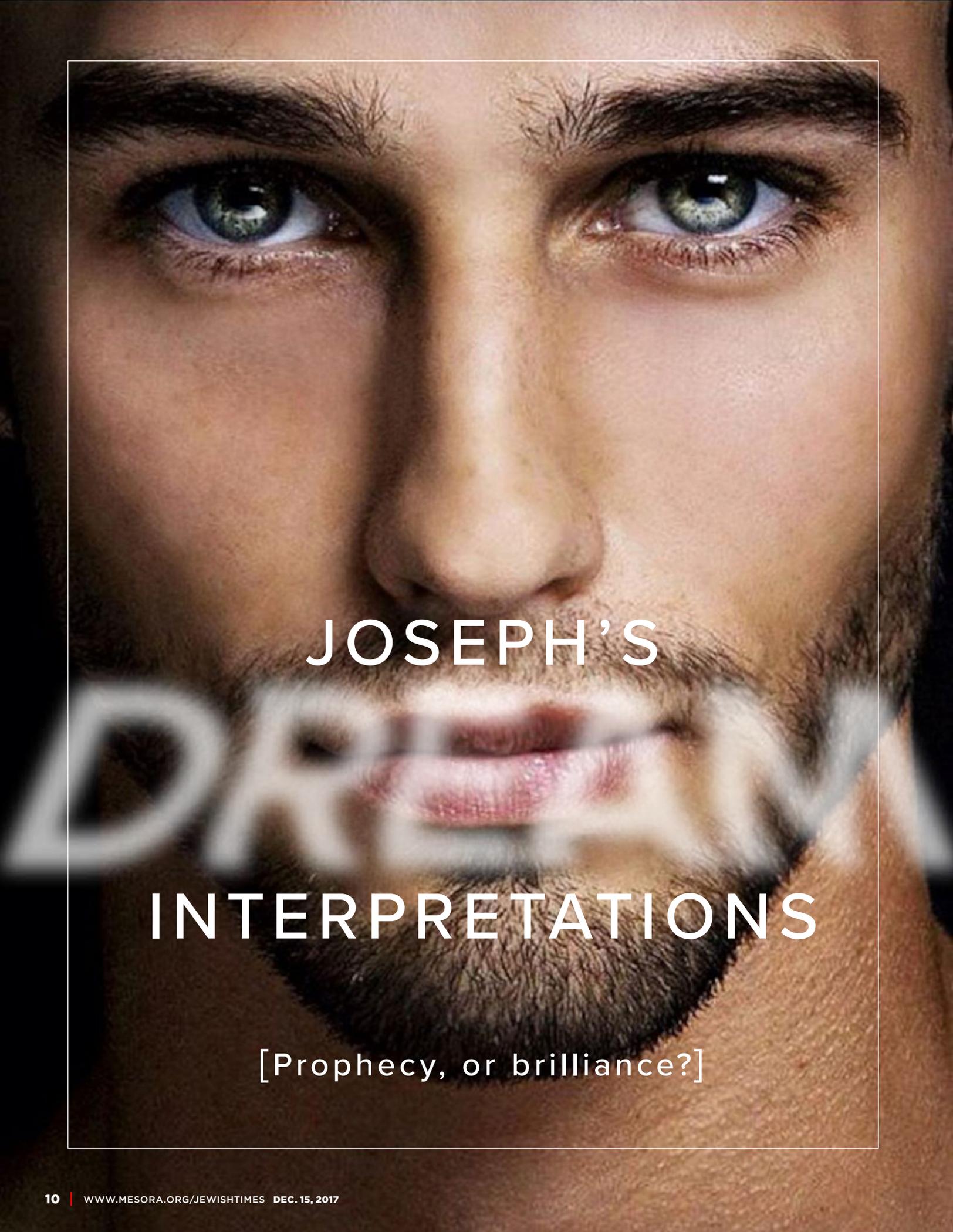
The Egyptians were reluctant to follow Joseph's order. Joseph used his control over the rationing system to convince them. He refused them grain unless they were circumcised. The Egyptians then came to Pharaoh (verse 55) asking him to override Joseph's demand. Pharaoh reprimanded them for being dependent on Joseph and not storing their own grain. They explained that they did store grain but that it rotted. (Joseph had thoroughly researched the problem and knew precisely how to store the grain so that it would not rot). Pharaoh answered the Egyptians mystically stating that the reason their grain rotted was that Joseph cast a spell on their grain so that no one would usurp his position. Primitive people are always fearful of malevolence from those whom they secretly conspire against. Pharaoh augmented their fear by advising them to follow Joseph's instruction, lest he cast a spell on them for their evil intention to displace him.

Pharaoh gave way under years of pressure from his high officials. He retracted the great grace he had shown Joseph at the outset and even conspired secretly to displace him. His problem was a political one; not a religious or philosophical one. The Torah teaches us an important principle: one's political actions can affect one's religious commitment. Pharaoh's giving way to political pressure caused him to turn against Joseph. Once one turns against the man of God one must eventually turn away from God himself. Pharaoh's answer was mystical and nonsensical. He had dropped from the heights he had reached at his first meeting with Joseph and reverted to the magical and superstitious. We cannot say for certain that he had lost all. He may have become ambivalent about his religious convictions, as most people are.

Joseph won the day with his success in preserving grain. He was once again indispensable. But he continued to struggle to maintain his position. He implemented laws to resolve his problem with identifica-

tion. He bought up all the land from the Egyptians and moved them from place to place making them all feel like vagabonds and strangers (*Ibid. 47:20,21*). He brought great wealth to Pharaoh feeling that his security laid more with Pharaoh than with the Egyptian people.

The wise old Jacob realized that with Joseph's diminishing powers it would be no easy matter to have his remains removed from Egypt. The Egyptians venerated the old Jacob and ascribed to him mystical powers. They wished him to be buried in Egypt. Jacob forced Joseph to guarantee his burial in Canaan with a solemn oath. After Jacob died and Joseph wished to remove him from Egypt, he couldn't do so on his own; he couldn't even ask Pharaoh [directly] on his own. In Genesis 50:4,5,6 we read, *"And when the days of his mourning were past Joseph spoke to the house of Pharaoh saying, 'If now I have found favor in your eyes, speak, I pray you in the ears of Pharaoh saying, 'My father made me swear saying, 'Lo I die in my grave which I have dug for myself in the land of Canaan there shall you bury me.' Now therefore let me go up I pray thee and bury my father and I will come back.'"* Joseph had to ask the house of Pharaoh to plead his case before Pharaoh, stating that he was bound by a solemn oath to bury his father out of Egypt. There is quite a contrast between the Joseph described here and the flamboyant figure depicted at the outset of his career. The effects of his early dazzling successes had faded and his position had been seriously compromised. At the end, after a lifetime of struggle, he said to his brothers, *"I die: and God will surely visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." And Joseph took an oath of the Children of Israel saying 'God will surely visit you and you shall carry up my bones from here'"* (*Ibid. 50:24,25*). Joseph wanted no remnant of himself left in Egypt. He did not wish to be remembered as the grand vizier of Egypt, but as the man who considered his high office as only a means of sustaining his brothers, the fledgling nation, in their diasporic movement toward their ultimate goal—the Land of Israel. ■



JOSEPH'S

DAVE

INTERPRETATIONS

[Prophecy, or brilliance?]



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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

When he was 17, Joseph dreamt of eleven sheaves bowing to his. And then in another dream, he saw eleven stars and the sun and moon bowing to him. Even after seeing his brothers' dismay at his retelling the first dream, Joseph nonetheless felt compelled for some reason, to repeat his second dream to his brothers and his father, in a second recounting. It was due to these dreams that the brothers conspired to kill Joseph...eventually selling him instead. It was his father who suggested and rejected an interpretation that they would all bow to Joseph: the eleven stars being his eleven brothers, and the sun and moon representing Joseph's parental figures. At this stage, it does not appear that Joseph offered his own interpretation. Yet, thirteen years later, Joseph accurately and astonishingly interprets not only the dreams of Pharaoh's stewards, but also Pharaoh's dreams. All three dreams came true exactly! But how did Joseph know their interpretations? This question is strengthened by Joseph's apparent lack of interpretative skills with regards to his own two dreams. And many of the Torah commentaries including Ramban and Klay Yakkar do not suggest Joseph was divinely inspired with the interpretations: he succeeded in unraveling each dream solely through his own wisdom.

Later on, when his brothers descended to Egypt to purchase food during the famine, the brothers do not recognize the now 39-year-old, bearded Joseph standing before them. It is suggested that a further denial of this Egyptian viceroy truly being Joseph, was generated from the brothers' rejection of any success Joseph would attain; having been humiliated by his brothers, they were sure Joseph would be psychologically crippled.

When Joseph sees his brothers, he "recalls the dreams".

According to a wise Rabbi, this means that Joseph would use the Divine license provided by these dreams to subjugate his brothers into repentance. Creating a situation where the youngest Benjamin would be imprisoned on false charges, Joseph orchestrated a replica of his very own sale to force his brothers into a parallel dilemma. Would they abandon the accused Benjamin now, who ostensibly stole Joseph's goblet, as they had done 20 years earlier when they sold Joseph? Or, would they display complete repentance, and sacrifice themselves for their brother? Normally, one is not permitted to place anyone else under such a trial, but Joseph recognized his dreams as Divine in origin, and as a license to perfect his brothers. As this wise Rabbi taught, the first dream of the brothers' sheaves bowing to his – physical dominance – was the precursor for Joseph's dominance over them in the spiritual realm – symbolized by the eleven stars, sun and moon bowing to him. Then first dream was meant by God to teach Joseph that when the brothers would bow to him for food, Joseph thereby received permission to rule over them in regards to their perfection, symbolized by higher bodies: the luminaries.

Subsequent to his dreams, Joseph understood their meaning; and not necessarily 39 years later when he first saw his brothers...but perhaps much earlier. The Torah only tells us that he recalled the dreams upon seeing his brothers, to teach that this was when he would act upon those dreams. But their interpretation may have preceded this by many years. We must now ask: when did Joseph become such a great interpreter? He was in prison most of the time in Egypt, and he didn't seem to offer interpretation to his own dreams at 17 years of age. From where did Joseph obtain such knowledge of dreams, that he would eventually interpret the dreams of Pharaoh's stewards and Pharaoh himself, with such precision? We are aware of the Torah's description of Joseph as "Ben Zekunim" or as Unkelos translates, "a wise son". Jacob taught Joseph all his knowledge attained at the Yeshiva of Shem and Aver. Perhaps this included lessons Jacob learned from his own dream of the ladder, and maybe others. So at the very outset, Joseph was a wise individual.

We also wonder why God gave these two dreams to Joseph, as they apparently contributed, if not caused, Joseph's sale. But we cannot approach God's true intent without His saying so. However, we can study, and perhaps suggest possibilities.

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God's Dreams: Altering History and Offering Perfection

God is perfectly just. He would not jeopardize Joseph's life or well being, had Joseph nature not warranted this sale. We learn that Joseph beautified himself. He also reported his brother's wrong doings to his father. He had an egoistic tendency, which was rightfully corrected as God humbled him in prison for many years. He publicized his dreams attracting unnecessary jealousy upon himself, which culminated in his sale and ultimately, his imprisonment. Thus, with Joseph's dreams, God clearly intended to perfect him. But that was not the only reason for the dreams. As we mentioned, the genius painter performed one stroke of his brush, and created a perfect picture with tremendous detail. God's dreams prophetically sent to Joseph also had many ramifications.

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

So the dreams perfected Joseph by contributing to his sale and refinement of his ego; they enabled Joseph to perfect his brothers by forcing them to defend Benjamin; and they perfected his father as well, forcing him to break his bond to Rachel expressed in her son Benjamin. We might think these matters alone are amazing, that two dreams might offer so much good for so many. However, there is a great deal more to Joseph's dreams. Something even more astonishing.

Dream Instruction

We asked earlier how Joseph transformed into such a brilliant dream interpreter. How did he know that the dreams of the stewards and Pharaoh were true and Divine? What did Joseph know about dreams? All he had were his two dreams years

earlier! Soon thereafter he was cast into prison for over a decade. However, those dreams offered Joseph more than we think.

What was Joseph doing in prison this entire time? Of course he must have had chores, and he was promoted to oversee the other inmates. But he had his solitude as well...time to think. Having received tremendous knowledge from his father, the teachings of Shem and Avar, Joseph gained deep insight into how God rules the world, and interacts with mankind. He knew the concept of repentance, for he was soon to be the conductor of his family's repentance. He too must have reflected on his own state seeking repentance, "Why am I in prison? What is my sin?" He soon realized his dreams precipitated his descent into slavery, and that God gave him these dreams. He analyzed his dreams, and must have spent many hours, days, and weeks studying God's precise communications of the night. What did he discover?

Pharaoh and His Stewards

Ten years elapsed in prison. One day, Joseph saw the wine and bakery stewards were troubled by their dreams, and invited them to recount them before him. Joseph interpreted both dreams exactly in line with what happened: the wine steward was returned to his post, and the baker was hung. Two more years go by, and Joseph finds himself before Pharaoh. Pharaoh heard of Joseph's interpretive skills, and he too told Joseph his dreams. Again Joseph interprets the dreams with exact precision, and they come true. But if God did not tell Joseph the future, how did he know it? We now arrive at the core of the issue...

2 Divine Signs: Dreamer & Duplication

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

Joseph received these dreams, and none other. He also received "two" dreams. Ramban states that two separate but similar dreams are unnatural: Pharaoh could have naturally seen

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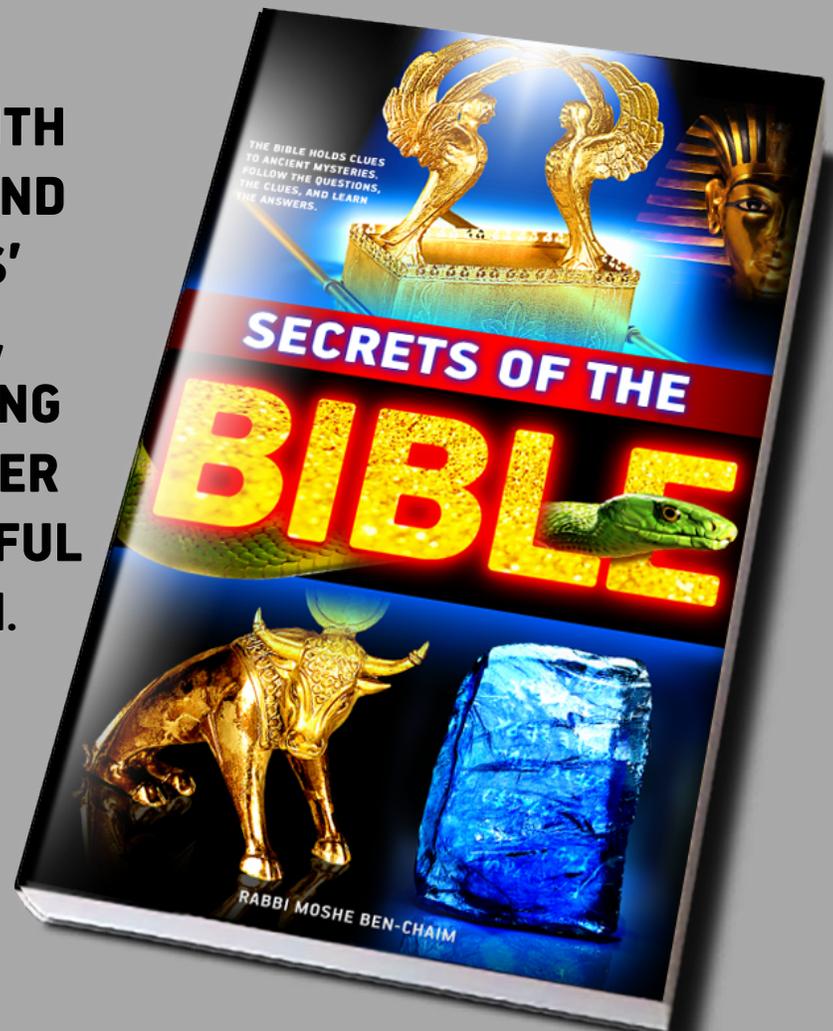


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both of the dreams' content concerning the cows and the ears in one single dream. (Ramban, Gen. 41:32) Pharaoh didn't wake up and dream similar content again...unless it was Divinely inspired. The same rule applies to the two stewards who dreamt similar dreams. And Joseph knew this. Joseph too had two separate dreams with similar content. (Gen. 37:9) In Numbers 12:6 Ibn Ezra teaches that duplication in dreams indicates their Divine origin: "[Divine] dreams are doubled, as is the manner of prophecies".

Joseph had many years to ponder his situation in prison, and much of what he may have pondered, was the last event leading him into prison: his dreams. He knew they were from God, as he tells his brothers years later: "God sent me before you to place for you a remnant in the land and to sustain you..." (Gen. 45:7) What did Joseph determine were indicative of Divine dreams? He recognized dream duplication was unnatural. He also recognized that his dreams affected his perfection, so the "recipient" also indicates Divine intent. These two elements were contained in the stewards' dreams, and in Pharaoh's dreams. The stewards' dream duplications were a variation, but no less telling of their Divine nature, since they both occurred the very same night, to two individuals. Pharaoh also had two dreams, and of additional significance, it was "Pharaoh" – the man with the wherewithal to address the forecasted famine – who received the dreams.

Joseph understood from his own experience that dream duplication, and a strategic dream recipient point to the dream's Divine nature. So convinced was Joseph of their Divine origin, that the recipient is of a telling nature, Joseph says to Pharaoh, "What God plans He has told to Pharaoh". (Gen. 41:25) Joseph meant to say, "Your reception of this dream as opposed to another indicates its Divine nature". And Joseph repeats this in verse 28.

Had God not granted Joseph these two Divine dreams, Joseph would not have pondered dreams. He would not necessarily have studied their style, to the point that he was able to facilitate the good outcome God desired, by emancipating himself through the stewards' interpretations, and rising to viceroy applying his wisdom to Pharaoh's dreams.

Amazing!

God used dreams not only to perfect Jacob's household, but also to train Joseph in dream design and interpretation...the very

matter essential for carving our Jewish history. The design of Joseph's dreams contained the blueprint for determining the Divine nature of the other dreams he would confront. In other words: his dreams were actually dream instructions, not just messages. This is akin to a coded message in an alien language, where the message content is one lesson, but the textual arrangement also contains hints to decipher this new language. Joseph's dreams' "content" contained a message for directing his perfecting of his family. But the dream "design" (selected recipient and duplication) taught him how to unravel dreams in general.

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

The very dreams that caused Joseph's imprisonment, also provided his escape, and helped sustain that generation.

We appreciate God's wisdom: with one action He effectuates the greatest good for so many. We also realize that without Joseph's appreciation that God teaches man with sublime wisdom, Joseph would not have engaged his own wisdom to discern God's will, nor would Joseph acquire the dream interpretation skills he discovered while in prison. But since Joseph had such deep knowledge of how God works, he turned all his efforts while in prison to analyzing his dreams, using wisdom to 1) uncover God's message, and 2) study dream style so as to determine which dreams are Divine, and how to interpret them.

A Fifth Message

Additionally, dreams are – by definition – a manifestation of "hidden" material. Understanding this, Joseph knew that if God communicates with His prophets in dreams, as stated in Numbers 12:6, it is for this reason. God wishes to indicate that just as dreams conceal deeper ideas, so too do God's dreams, and even more so. God's selected mode of communicating with His prophets via dreams, is meant to underscore the principle that God's words too must undergo man's interpretation, if the intended message is to be discovered. With that appreciation,

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Joseph delved into the study of dreams, both prophetic and mundane. He also determined that dreams of Divine origin contain a code, and once detected, can be understood. Joseph knew that wisdom is how God designed the world. Therefore, it is only with wisdom that man succeeds.

Relevance to Us

Does this lesson have any relevance in our lives? Without witnessing a miracle, we certainly cannot determine with any certainty that a given action is the hand of God. Maybe it is, maybe not. We do not know. We must review our successes and failures with the possibility that God's education of man can take one of two roads: 1) Divine intervention for the individual, as with Joseph's dreams; or 2) natural laws of general providence, such as "boredom" with new acquisitions. God designed man's psyche to be frustrated with overindulgence in the physical pleasures, so as to redirect our energies back to the world of Torah wisdom. This is not individual providence, but a law of nature that applies equally to all members of mankind. Our consideration of our travails must straddle both spheres of God's workings. And since the Talmud teaches that prophecy has ceased, our dreams are not prophetic. However, there is a primary lesson that does apply to us all.

A Life of Wisdom

Joseph's approach to life was based on his knowledge that God

created all. Thus, the world "naturally" functions according to God's wisdom. Despite the fact that God did not reveal Pharaoh's or his stewards' interpretations; Joseph secured perfection and sustenance for his family and all of Egypt using wisdom alone. Since he guided his actions purely based on wisdom, he was not in conflict with God's world that functions according to that same, singular wisdom. Rather, he was perfectly in line with it, as his successes teach. We too can perceive God's wisdom if we earnestly seek it out from His Torah. Wisdom is the key to success and happiness in all areas. We do not need God telling us anything more, or sending signs, just like Joseph did not need God to interpret the dreams. In fact, God has already intervened by giving His Torah to us all. Responding to our misfortunes with safe-sounding beliefs that "it's all for the good", man deceives himself, and will repeat his errors that caused him to say that the first time. It is only through analyzing our ways and seeing if they match Torah ideals, that we will terminate our need to falsely pacify ourselves with "it's all for the good". Using reason in all areas, and admitting our errors with a responsible analysis and internal change, we can engage wisdom to steer us to the truly good path, one that God wills for all mankind, and is readily available without further intervention. The Torah has all we need. No quick fixes, amulets, or blessings will address what God says requires wisdom and personal perfection. "For only with this may one glorify himself: understand and know Me; for I am Hashem who does kindness, justice and righteousness in land, for in these I desire, so says Hashem." (Jeremiah, 9:23) ■



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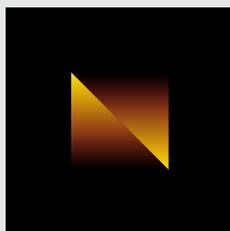
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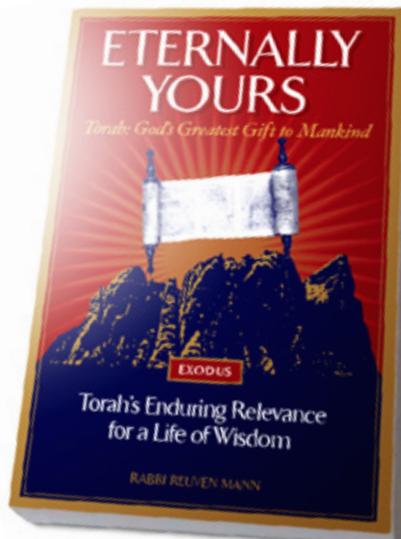


THE COURAGE TO WAIT

JOSEPH'S PATIENCE HAD AN IDEALISTIC OBJECTIVE

by, Rabbi Reuven Mann

*Author of the new book
"Eternally Yours"
on Exodus*



This week's parsha, Mikeitz, continues with the story of Yosef, who is one of the most inspiring figures in the entire Torah. We learn from him that, no matter how bleak the situation, there is never cause for despair. Yosef had suffered the worst misfortunes. Turned upon by his own brothers, he became an Egyptian slave at the age of 17. What chance did this Jewish kid have in a strange land, which even then abhorred the Ivrim (Hebrews)?

Yet, he did not wallow in self-pity. Yosef retained his faith that there is a G-d who rules the world and applied himself to the tasks his master put before him. Being well suited to his job, he achieved one success after another. His master, Potiphar, took note and kept promoting Yosef until he totally commanded every aspect of Potiphar's affairs.

Success, however, comes with its challenges. Enter Potiphar's wife, who "suddenly" discovered that Yosef was

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extremely handsome. The danger he faced in dealing with her attempt at seduction was greater than any he had faced before. His soul was on the line. Summoning all his moral energy, he resisted her numerous advances. The Rambam regards Yosef's mighty deed of abstention as a Kiddush Hashem (sanctification of G-d's name).

Sometimes, however, one pays a heavy price for a great mitzvah. The spurned lady turned against Yosef, accused him of attempted rape, and he was thrown in jail. Here too, he retained his composure and, apparently, his optimism. Yosef clearly had a cheerful, charismatic personality, as he found favor with all his jailers. When opportunity arose, he took advantage of it and boldly offered to interpret the dreams of the king's baker and butler, who were imprisoned with him.

Disappointment ensued, as the butler failed to honor Yosef's request to be remembered to Pharaoh. Deliverance, when it came, would be from Hashem. Pharaoh had dreams portending some kind of national disaster. When none of his advisors were able to successfully explain their meaning, the butler's memory was jogged, and he mentioned Yosef to Pharaoh.

This was Yosef's opportunity, and he made full use of it. His brilliant interpretation of the dreams and his accompanying advice dazzled Pharaoh and his court. The ruler decided he absolutely needed to have this man "in whom there resides the spirit of G-d" take full control over the affairs of the kingdom. This was one of the greatest "rags to riches" miracles in all of history. How could a 17-year-old Jewish slave, who had been imprisoned for attempted rape, rise to become absolute ruler over Egypt? "Many are the thoughts in the heart of man, but the plan of Hashem, that will prevail."

Commentators have often questioned Yosef's behavior after his assumption of power. Why, they ask, did he not immediately get in touch with his father to inform him that he was alive? Obviously, communication in those days was not as easy as it is now. But caravans did go to

Canaan and, as Egypt's ruler, he could have sent a message to his family. Basic decency and the requirement of honoring one's father should have prompted him to send word about his great fortune. Yet, he remained silent, keeping the good news to himself until he recognized his brothers when they came down to Egypt to procure provisions 9 years later. How can we explain his strange behavior?

The answer resides in the dreams of Yosef's youth, which prophetically depicted him as the spiritual leader of his family. He knew that the family could not be reunited unless all the parties acknowledged their sins and did genuine teshuvah (repentance). Thus, he had to wait for the right opportunity. Had the family discovered that Yosef was the ruler of Egypt, they would have owned up to their past errors, but that would have been purely motivated by fear. Such a repentance would have been meaningless.

Yosef mastered his natural longing to reunite with his family, because he placed their spiritual perfection above his personal emotional desires. He had learned how to wait for the divinely ordained "right moment." His faith in Hashem and his confidence in his own wisdom enabled him to wait a full 9 years before revealing his secret.

Finally, the opportunity emerged, when Yosef recognized his brothers, who were in Egypt to purchase food. Then he "remembered his dreams" and knew that the time had come. He had had much time to devise his carefully prepared scheme, and he confronted his unsuspecting brothers as they were gathering their supplies. The goal was to reunite the family through teshuvah, and the plan worked: Klal Yisrael (the Jewish nation) was saved, and the will of Hashem prevailed.

At this season of Chanukah, we recount Hashem's many miracles. May we have the faith and courage to wait for the opportunities He always provides, and the wisdom to make proper use of them.

Shabbat shalom v'Chanukah sameach! ■



THE LINK

Rabbi Chaim Ozer Chait

Written by Eli Roth

Why is parshat read Miketz on the shabbos of Chanukkah? Instead, perhaps we can ask why parshat Vayeishev comes before Chanukkah. In Vayeishev, Yosef is thrown in the pit. The posuk says: "the pit was empty, and there was no water in the pit." Rashi quotes a gemara asking why does it need to say there's no water in the pit if it already told us it's empty, it should be obvious! He answers that it's to show us that there was no water, but there were snakes and scorpions. In the gemara this drash is quoted sandwiched between two halachot of Chanukkah.

Why would this drash be quoted along side Chanukah when they're seemingly unrelated?

There's a midrash that says that when Yaakov died, Yosef went to a pit. The brothers got scared that Yosef was going there to spark his anger that they threw him in a pit they feared that he would now kill them. The midrash says that in truth, Yosef went there to pray, to give thanks to Hashem for the miracle that he survived the pit.

We learn from the midrash that we are allowed to add to tefilla for a miracle that happened to us. Based on this, we gain halachic permission to make a holiday of Channukah and it's not considered ba'al tosif (adding to the Torah).

Now the answer becomes clear. The reason this drash was within Chanukkah is because Yosef prayed to Hashem for that miracle. It directly relates to Chanukah! And the reason Vayeishev is before Chanukkah is to remember this idea of the permission to establish the holiday! ■





Solace in Being Hated

Rabbi Bernie Fox

On the miracles, on the redemption, on the mighty acts, on the salvations, and on the wars that You performed for our fathers in those days, in this time. (Al HaNisim prayer)

The Chanukah and Purim versions of the Al HaNisim prayer

Chanukah and Purim both recall dramatic episodes in Jewish history. In both of these episodes we were confronted by threats of annihilation and in each we were rescued by Hashem. There are also similarities in the observance of these two celebrations. On both, we insert into the Amidah and into Birkat HaMazon a version of the Al HaNisim thanksgiving prayer.

Let us compare and contrast these two versions of the prayer. Both versions share a fundamental theme – salvation from our enemies. This theme is presented through the three basic components of the prayer. The Al HaNisim prayer opens with the above statement of thanksgiving. We acknowledge the salvation of our people by Hashem. Second, the prayer describes a conflict that threatened to destroy us. In regards to Purim, this is the plan of Haman to annihilate the Jewish people in the kingdom of Achashverosh. Chanukah recalls our conflict with the Hellenist Assyrian kingdom. The third element describes our triumph over our wicked adversary or our

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salvation from catastrophe. The Purim version of the Al HaNisim prayer is briefer than the Chanukah version. The reason for its brevity is that it does not include as elaborate a description of our rescue. The Purim version merely states that Hashem undermined Haman's plans. Rather than annihilating the Jews, Haman and his sons were destroyed.

You adopted their grievance. You enforced their judgement. You avenged them. You delivered the mighty into the hand of the weak, the many into the hand of the few, the defiled into the hand of the pure, the wicked into the hand of the righteous, the willfully evil into the hand of those who study Your Torah. And for Yourself, You made Your name great and sanctified in Your world. (Al HaNisim prayer for Chanukah)

The unique elements of the Chanukah version of Al HaNisim

In the Chanukah version the third element is much more elaborate and descriptive. It includes the following material:

- Hashem is described as working through the Jewish people. He empowers them to overcome their adversaries.
- Two paradigms are used to describe the Jewish people's triumph over their enemies. One paradigm is military. The might and superior numbers of the enemy were overcome by a smaller and weaker force. The second paradigm is a moral one. The righteous and pure defeated the wicked and defiled.
- The triumph of the Jews over their enemies is described as a sanctification of Hashem's name.

Let us consider these last two components.

In the days of Matityahu the son of Yochanan, the Kohen Gadol of the Hashmonaim family and his sons. When the evil Hellenist kingdom arose against Your nation to force them to forget Your Torah and to violate the statutes of Your will. (Al HaNisim prayer for Chanukah)

The character of the Chanukah conflict

In order to appreciate the significance of this added material, we must consider more carefully the fundamental nature of each of these conflicts. The Purim miracle was that Hashem saved His people from Haman's plan to destroy the Jewish nation. It is true that he was motivated by issues stemming from our commitment to Torah. Specifically, he understood that Judaism opposes the exaltation and worship of any human being. He resented the Jewish people because they were an obstacle to his promulgation of the self-myth of greatness. However, despite this religious underpinning, the conflict did not manifest itself as a religious struggle. Haman was not interested in altering the religious doctrines of the Jewish people. He wished to annihilate us. In short, the religious conflicts were in the background and latent. The manifest expression was a campaign to destroy our people.

In contrast, Chanukah focuses upon an historical religious conflict. The Hellenists were not bent upon destroying the Jewish people. They sought to convert us to their world view. This was a conflict between perspectives and cultures. The Hellenists directed their aggression against our Torah. They suppressed Torah study and observance and they defiled the Bait HaMikdash – the Sacred Temple. This battle was over religious issues.

This difference between the two conflicts is reflected in the way they are respectively described in the Al HaNisim prayer. The Chanukah victory is not described merely in military terms – the few and weak overcame the strong and the many. It is described in religious and moral terms. The righteous overcame the wicked and the sacred vanquished the defiled. Why is this religious/moral paradigm employed? It provides a description of the conflict – it was religious in nature.

The Chanukah victory sanctified Hashem's name

Understanding this difference between the two conflicts explains another aspect of their respective treatments in the Al HaNisim prayer.

The defeat of Haman and the preservation of the Jewish people is not characterized in the Al HaNisim prayer as a sanctification of Hashem's name. This is because the overt conflict was not focused upon good versus evil. It was a conflict between two peoples. The defeat of the Hellenists is described as a sanctification of Hashem's name because this conflict was focused upon issues of right and wrong, good and evil. It is the triumph of righteousness over wickedness that sanctifies Hashem's name.

The foundation of our enemies' hatred

As noted above, both conflicts were motivated by religious antipathies. They differ in the manner in which the religious resentments were expressed. Haman's strategy was to destroy our nation. The Assyrian Hellenists sought to uproot our commitment to our Torah. In both instances we survived and our enemies were defeated. These are two of many instances in which our enemies have tried to destroy us. We have survived these countless persecutions only through the intervention of Hashem. However, despite the incessant nature of the antipathy directed against our people, we have reason to actually derive solace from our historical plight. If our enemies truly believed in the superiority of their own world-view, they would have no reason to wish to destroy us. They would merely dismiss us as a clan of primitives. Why did Haman and the Hellenists not merely ignore us? Implicitly expressed in our enemies' consistent hatred and aggression is their acknowledgment of their insecurities. Haman, the Assyrians, and so many other subsequent adversaries could not dismiss us because they knew deep in their hearts that we represent a truth that they could not ignore and that threatened their own world-view. So, although we continue to be the target of hatred and aggression, we receive some comfort. We know that their regard for the truth of our Torah underlies their behavior. ■



Incomplete Good

Rabbi Dr. Darrell Ginsberg



We are first introduced to the Sar HaMashkim, or chief cupbearer for Pharaoh, at the end of the weekly portion of Vayeishev. The chief baker was in prison along with the chief cupbearer due to “sins” against Pharaoh; ostensibly, some type of negligence on the job. They both had troubling dreams, to which Yosef, who was in prison with them, was able to accurately interpret. Whereas the cupbearer would be returned to his job, the chief baker received a death sentence. Yosef implores that the cupbearer recall his assistance. The portion ends with an ominous message regarding Yosef’s fate in prison (Bereishit 40:23):

“But the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, and he forgot him”

There is a Midrash that explains how an angel intervened to ensure this forgetfulness would persevere (a punishment due to Yosef’s placement of faith in the chief cupbearer). The chief cupbearer wanted to remember Yosef, and sets up various prompts. However, the angel sabotaged each one. The message is that there was some imperative for the cupbearer to “forget” Yosef.

A similar dream dilemma is found at the beginning of the portion of Mikeitz, with Pharaoh struggling how to interpret his visions. He turns to his advisors, but they provide no solace.

Our forgetful chief cupbearer re-enters the scene one final time (41:9-14):

“Now the chief cupbearer spoke with Pharaoh, saying, “I call to mind my sins today. Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and he put me in prison, in the house of the chief slaughterer, me and the chief baker. And we dreamed a dream on the same night, I and he; each one according to the interpretation of his dream, we dreamed. And there with us was a Hebrew lad, a slave of the chief slaughterer, and we told him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; [for] each [of us], he interpreted according to his dream. And it came to pass that just as he had interpreted, so it was; me he restored to my position, and him he hanged.”

Pharaoh immediately calls for Yosef, and the rest is Jewish history.

The chief cupbearer seems like a decent fellow. Sure, he forgot Yosef? Yes, but as the Midrash indicates, it was not entirely his fault. Yet, as is often the case, the Sages see this individual much differently. The Midrash discusses the chief cupbearer’s return to the big stage. He noted that Pharaoh’s life might be in danger due to the strain of interpreting these dreams. If so, who knows if the new king would retain him in his esteemed position. Thus, it was in his best interest to hold onto his current employment. His initial statement is an acknowledgment of his “sins”, meaning multiple transgressions. The first was his forgetting Yosef and the good done to him. The second was that he did not reveal sooner he knew someone who could assist Pharaoh.

If the Midrash stopped here, we would salute the chief cupbearer for stepping forward, regardless of what happened in the past. Yet the Sages note what might appear to be a mere detail in his account. The chief cupbearer describes Yosef as a “young Hebrew slave”. While technically this was an accurate description of Yosef, the terms here were being used to reflect poorly on Yosef. The chief cupbearer was being condescending. Being young meant Yosef was lacking intelligence. He was an Ivri and a slave. In using these descriptions, the Sages explain

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that he was a rasha, an evil person. Why? Since the “good” he was offering in freeing Yosef from prison was incomplete.

This harsh condemnation is certainly not commensurate with the manner that the story is being told by the Torah. What idea is the Midrash attempting to convey? Why did the chief cupbearer preface his essential information regarding Yosef with an admission of mistake? Why is someone considered evil if he does not offer a “complete good”?

Let’s first understand the idea behind the first Midrash concerning the Divine involvement. One can only imagine the drama and tension in the chief cupbearer’s life regarding his demise and ultimate redemption at the hands of Yosef. Furthermore, the fact that he was saved while his fellow “employee” was killed must have been traumatic as well. Without question, a part of him wanted to reward Yosef for his insights. He recognized the good Yosef had done for him. However, there was a part of him that needed to repress Yosef’s involvement in the entire episode. He had to set up reminders for himself, as if naturally he could not recall what Yosef had done. Ultimately, though, he would have remembered had it not been for some type of subtle causal manipulation (the Divine aspect to this). The critical point here is that the chief cupbearer was in conflict. Why?

The chief cupbearer’s intervention is what saves Yosef. Yet, as per the Midrash, his rationale for bringing up Yosef to Pharaoh was attached more towards job security than anything noble. He knew how important it was to remain in the good graces of Pharaoh. This could be the reason why he begins his presentation acknowledging his errors. If Yosef was indeed the savior, Pharaoh will want to know why Yosef wasn’t by his side sooner. If he investigated the circumstances, it would become evident that the chief cupbearer withheld this information from Pharaoh, putting his job and life in jeopardy. However, on a deeper level, he was conveying to Pharaoh how troubling having someone like Yosef be responsible for his redemption. Again, why is this the case?

The derogatory language used in

describing Yosef to Pharaoh is the opening to understanding the thinking of the chief cupbearer. Why did he choose to present Yosef in such a manner? Yosef was responsible for his return to Pharaoh’s good graces. But who was Yosef? He was a young lad, inexperienced, lacking in knowledge, someone who could not possibly have the insights required to be so wise. He was an Ivri, an inferior and perverse ideology relative to the Egyptian outlook. He was a slave, occupying the lowest rung of social strata. To acknowledge that such an individual was the solution to his problems was a supreme challenge to the chief cupbearer. How could he be dependent on someone like Yosef? In his mind, these descriptions of Yosef were defining Yosef’s essence as a person. Thus, admitting it was Yosef was a shock to his ego and sense of self-importance. The conflict concerning remembering Yosef was tied to this very problem. On the one hand, he felt gratitude to Yosef. On the other hand, just thinking about his dependence on that “young Jewish slave” was incomprehensible. As well, in acknowledging his forgetting of Yosef, he was communicating to Pharaoh, in a subtle manner, how challenging it would be for any person in position of power and importance to deal with such a “lowly” individual. Dependence on others can be a serious challenge to an individual overconfident in their self-worth. Such a person, then, will have an even more difficult time acknowledging an idea of dependence on God. The “evil” moniker applied to the chief cupbearer reflects this inner problem. A person who see himself as a purely independent existence can have little room for God.

The Sages are directing our attention to a common flaw. In the case of the chief cupbearer, the notion that an “inferior” person could engender an idea of dependence was a challenge to his sense of self-importance. In a more general sense, the disbelief that one is a dependent existence is the core problem, and it is simple to fall into that trap. When we allow our egos to define us, it becomes impossible to have a true assessment of ourselves. In such a case, we can never internalize and properly assess our relationship with God. ■

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