

The Meaning of Yosef's Estrangement

By Rav Yaakov Medan

The Ramban (42:9), as well as several other commentators who adopt his approach, discusses Yosef's estrangement from his brothers and the great severity with which he treats them up until the moment when he reveals his identity. This issue leads naturally to another question: why did Yosef not send word to his father, the moment that he rose to his elevated position in Egypt, telling him that he was still alive? Why did he allow his father to suffer such profound anguish and mourning for his son for an additional nine years? Ramban explains:

"The text is telling us that when Yosef saw his brothers bowing down before him, he remembered all the dreams that he had dreamed about them, and knew that not a single one of them had been fulfilled on this occasion. For he knew their interpretation: from the first dream, he knew that all his brothers would bow down to him - 'Behold, we were gathering sheaves,' with 'we' hinting at all eleven of his brothers - and in the second dream both the sun and moon and eleven stars would bow before him.

Since he did not see Binyamin among them, he thought up this plan as a ruse to cause them to bring Binyamin, his brother, to him, in order to fulfill the first dream first. Therefore, he did not wish to tell them, 'I am Yosef, your brother,' and to say, 'Hurry and bring up my father,' and to send the wagons, as he did after their second encounter, for his father would undoubtedly have come right away. After the first dream was fulfilled, he told them to fulfill the second one.

If this (i.e. bringing about the fulfillment of the dreams) had not been his motivation, Yosef would have committed a very grave sin: to cause his father anguish and to leave him for so many years mourning over Shimon and over him. Even if he wished to cause his brothers some anguish, how could he not have mercy on his grieving father? But in fact he did everything properly, at the proper time, in order to fulfill his dreams, for he knew that they would truly be realized...

I maintain that all of these matters pertaining to Yosef arose from his wisdom in interpreting dreams. For we must ask: after Yosef had been in Egypt for many years, and

was the head of the household of a great minister in Egypt, how is it that he did not send a single letter to his father, to tell him [that he was still alive] and to comfort him? For Egypt is approximately a six-day journey from Chevron, but even if the distance would take a year - it would be proper to send word out of honor to his father, who would surely pay a king's ransom to free him.

But [Yosef] saw that [the scene of] his brothers bowing down to him, as well as his father and all his progeny, could never take place in their country; he hoped that it could take place there, in Egypt, when they saw his great success there. And especially after he heard Pharaoh's dream, when it became clear to him that all of them would come there, and all of his dreams would be fulfilled."

Ramban views Yosef's actions and failures in the parasha as the result of a determined effort to bring about the fulfillment of his dreams. In his view, it was not sufficient that ten of his brothers bowed before him; he wanted Yaakov and Binyamin to come and bow too, as foretold in the details of the dream.

R. Yitzchak Arama, author of the commentary Akeidat Yitzchak, raises the following difficulty:

"The One Who gives dreams will arrange for their fulfillment. Yet we see the great foolishness of a person attempting to bring about the fulfillment of dreams, for they are things that come about without the intention of the dreamers."

What gives a person license to transgress the honoring of his father and the prohibition against revenge and grudge-bearing just in order to realize some dreams?

The Ba'al ha-Akeida and Abarbanel explain that Yosef's estrangement from his brothers arose from his desire to test their relationship towards Binyamin. His aim was to cause his brothers to repent for what they had done to him. He meant to lead them into circumstances that were similar - as far as possible - to those that prevailed at his sale, by demanding of them that they leave Binyamin to his fate as a slave in Egypt. I shall adopt their approach in this shiur, combining it with the Ramban's interpretation above. Nechama Leibowitz explains these approaches in her usual insightful way in her book. I shall explore a different path, particularly in the interpretation of the Ramban, and the reader is left to choose.

A. DREAMS

Our parasha presents three pairs of dreams: the pair dreamed by Yosef, the two dreams of Pharaoh's two servants, and Pharaoh's own pair of dreams. The consistent structure of the dreams would seem to hint at a connection between them.

Let us first address the last two pairs. An obvious question arises from the dreams of Pharaoh's servants, and particularly from the dream of the butler, as to the wisdom involved in their interpretation. Why did these men need Yosef's assistance in understanding their dreams, and why were the butler and Pharaoh so excited about Yosef's interpretations? After all, the butler dreamed about pressing grapes into Pharaoh's goblet and serving it to him, and this is word for word what Yosef told him would happen. The baker's dream is a little less obvious, but the fact that the basket is not offered by his hand to Pharaoh, but rather the birds eat of the baked goods from atop his head, leaves little room for doubt as to the man's fate.

The same would seem to apply to Pharaoh's own dreams. The possible interpretations offered in the Midrash - that he would conquer seven provinces while seven others would rebel, or that seven daughters would be born to him while seven others would die, sound highly unlikely; it is no wonder that Pharaoh rejects them. The seven healthy cows and the seven full ears of wheat upon the banks of the river symbolize very clearly years of plenty, while the thin cows and the blasted ears of wheat unquestionably represent years of famine. Not every dream requires interpretation, and the proof for this lies in Yosef's dreams, whose significance was immediately understood by Yaakov and his sons.

Another question regarding Yosef's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream: After the news of the imminent abundance of food to be followed by the famine, Yosef continues and says:

"Now let Pharaoh seek out a man who is wise and knowing, and give him charge of the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh act to appoint officers over the land, and to divide the land of Egypt into five parts during the seven years of plenty, so that they will gather all the food of these imminent years of abundance, and collect corn under Pharaoh's hand, to store food in the cities. Then the food will be a store for the land for the seven years of famine that shall be in the land of Egypt, and the land shall not perish from the famine." (41:33-36)

Ramban is astounded: who appointed Yosef as advisor to the king? What has his speech here to do with the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams?

He answers that the advice that Yosef gives Pharaoh is part of the interpretation. In the dream, the thin cows devour the healthy cows; in the interpretation - the years of famine devour the food from the years of plenty. But Ramban's explanation ignores the clear parallel between Pharaoh's pair of dreams and the two dreams of his servants. There, too, Yosef added details that appear unrelated to the dream:

"But remember me when things will be good for you, and please perform this kindness for me: mention me to Pharaoh and bring me out of this house, for I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and I have done nothing to cause them to put me in the dungeon." (40:14-15)

What is common to the conclusion of both interpretations is Yosef's concern for his own fate: even in his advice to Pharaoh, we cannot ignore the possibility that in mentioning a "wise and knowing man," Yosef is referring to himself. Moreover, in his words to the butler, too, it appears that Yosef means not only that justice should be sought from Pharaoh because Yosef is innocent - since there is no special reason why Pharaoh, king of the entire land, should take the trouble to get involved in the affairs of a slave who has been imprisoned. It seems, then, that what Yosef was asking from the butler was that he would tell Pharaoh how Yosef interpreted his dreams, so that Pharaoh would appoint him to sit among his chief advisors. For this reason, Yosef explains that he is neither a slave nor a criminal, and that he is worthy - in terms of his status - of such an elevated post.

>From what we have said above, it turns out that Yosef does not merely solve the straightforward dreams of Pharaoh and his servants. In his words to them, Yosef is actually interpreting his own dreams - about the sheaves bowing down before his sheaf, and the sun, moon and stars bowing before him.

Let me explain my view of the ability to dream and to interpret dreams. Chazal teach that dreams contain one-sixtieth of prophecy. But the dream itself is not prophecy, and the prophet Yirmiyahu draws a clear distinction between the two:

"The prophet who has a dream - let him tell his dream, and one whom My word is with him - let him speak My word faithfully; what is chaff to the wheat, says God. Is not My word like fire, says God, and like a hammer, shattering the rock?" ([Yirmiyahu 23:28-29](#))

At the same time, a dream and its interpretation certainly contain an element of Divine inspiration. The proof: Daniel, who dreams and interprets, is not a prophet, but his Book was included in the Tanakh.

The forefathers were prophets. When Yaakov dreams, this is prophecy, for God speaks to him in his dream. But God never spoke with Yaakov's sons, and they were not prophets. Yosef - whose level is somewhere between that of the forefathers and that of his brothers (since Yosef's sons, like Yaakov's sons, founded tribes) - is not a prophet, but he is certainly the recipient of Divine inspiration.

It seems, then, that Divine inspiration lacks the power to interpret a dream in all its details, and this is not its function. But when Yosef dreams about his brothers' sheaves bowing

down to his own, he feels within himself a sense of mission and a consequent grant of authority. He will be responsible for sustaining his brothers; they will recognize his responsibility for them and will acknowledge his authority over them as arising from this responsibility.

Where did this dream come from?

For some time, Yaakov's household had been pervaded with a sense that Yaakov - the patriarch and head of the household - was gradually losing his leadership ability. It is unclear where this feeling began. Perhaps it was his numerous - perhaps too numerous - bowings before Esav; Yaakov may have lost his authority in the eyes of his own household at that time. Faced with the atrocity of Shekhem, he remained silent until his sons returned; they spoke in his place and Shimon and Levi then went out and acted without asking his permission. Reuven, too - in his act concerning Bilha - rebelled against his father's authority, like Avshalom with his father's concubines. In the story of the sale of Yosef and the taking of Binyamin to Egypt, Yehuda leads the family while Yaakov is dragged along, almost unwillingly. Yosef is himself one of the competitors for leadership. He is younger than his brothers and he is their half-brother, hence his leadership over his brothers remains a dream. But the dream is a powerful one, and the fire of its truth burns within him. Yosef believes in it with all his might; he knows that the dream will eventually be fulfilled in reality. His certainty of the truth of his dream, filling all of his being, is the expression of the Divine inspiration that breathes within him.

The dream of the sheaves is related to the family's livelihood, but Yosef dreams not only of sheaves. The dream of the sun, moon and stars bowing to him expresses rulership in the spiritual realm, as well. The sense of mission that fills Yosef is related not only to supporting the family, as Nechama Leibowitz explains, but also to spiritual leadership and spiritual responsibility.

When Yosef is sold as a slave, his world collapses around him. Certainly his physical world collapses, owing to his humiliation and exile from his father's house and from his land. However, it is important to note that his spiritual world also collapses - for all of his educational efforts, all the criticism that he brought to his father concerning his brothers, have brought disaster instead of blessing. His brothers have sinned, and their crime is unbearable. Perhaps he was mistaken in his dreams; perhaps it is not he who is meant to lead the brothers? Perhaps there is no hope for them, spiritually, following their sin, and they should not be led but rather rejected and banished from the world of sanctity - in which case he too will not be a leader, but rather a fourth founding father of the chosen nation?

If Yosef had some lurking doubt as to having been mistaken in his dreams, his speedy climb up the ladder of success in his master's house comes and confirms his dreams, verifying that he is destined for greatness. God is with him; he senses this. His sense of being the chosen one among the brothers is only strengthened through the test of exile.

Yosef develops his budding leadership ability in his management of Potifar's household, but again he is stripped of his garb and cast into a dungeon - this time because of his master's wife. According to Chazal's calculations, Yosef remained in the dungeon, not seeing the light of day, for a full ten years! Throughout his twenties - years that a person usually devotes to molding his personality as an adult and creating a family - Yosef spent in the dungeon of the king's prisoners. Could there be any better reason for despair to consume his heart and his body?

In the situation in which Yosef now found himself, regular dreams of greatness and rulership would dissolve and disappear. But the moment that Yosef hears about two of Pharaoh's servants, both of whom have experienced dreams on the same night, he is immediately reminded of his own dreams. It is clear to him that the dreams of the two men are not God's way of telling them what is destined to happen to them: for what reason would God reveal the future to these two idolators, servants in Pharaoh's kitchen? He understands immediately that these dreams are actually a sign from God to him concerning his own dreams, which are about to begin their fulfillment. And so he addresses the two men resolutely:

"Yosef said to : Do solutions then not belong to God? Tell me, I pray you." (40:8)

As we have said, the crux of the interpretation lies not in the understanding that the royal butler will be restored to his previous position while the royal baker will be punished - for these scenarios are described almost explicitly in the dreams. The crux of the interpretation, to Yosef's view, lies in the continuation:

"But remember me when things are good for you, and do this kindness for me, I pray you: mention me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house, for I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, nor have I done anything here for which they have put me in the dungeon." (40:14-15)

The butler is convinced by Yosef's simple solution, for two reasons. Firstly, we may assume that the nervousness of the royal servants and their sullen expressions, following their dreams, did not arise from the opaque meaning of the dreams, but rather from the doubt gnawing at them as to whether they were true or just vanity. Yosef, convinced of the truth of his own dreams and certain that it is God Whose hand is now guiding everything that happens to him towards his destined mission, manages to transmit his conviction in his dream to Pharaoh's servants, such that they are likewise convinced of the truth of their dreams. Secondly, the only detail in the butler's dream that is ambiguous is the three branches. There is no hint in the dream that could possibly decipher them as symbolizing three days, three weeks, three years or any other units of time. Yosef declares decisively that the time frame concerns days, just as he will later tell Pharaoh:

"And concerning the fact that Pharaoh's dream occurred twice - [it is] because the

thing has been decided by God, and God will soon perform it." (41:32)

His conviction as to the veracity of the dream is also a conviction that God will not tarry; the events will occur in the shortest possible time. Indeed, what he says is what comes about: the three branches are indeed three days, not three years.

Likewise Pharaoh's dreams: according to both Chazal and Rashi, the Egyptian sorcerers preferred to propose interpretations that did not reflect the details of the dreams - the birth of seven daughters or the conquest of seven provinces - since these did not require them to note any specific time-frame. They proposed these interpretations because they were not certain of the seriousness of the dream, and hence they could not be certain of any interpretation that might come about.

Yosef's interpretation supplies a precise and immediate date. If Yosef had entertained the slightest doubt, he would not have dared to utter such a decisive interpretation, for which - if proved wrong - he will be executed. His interpretation of Pharaoh's dream, too, contains the dream's true significance - Yosef's advice that he be appointed ruler over Egypt - since it is thus that he now understands his own dreams. Without this profound sense of mission, based on Divine inspiration, Yosef would not dare to interpret his dreams with such unshakable confidence and with such daring. Yosef knew that, as the ruler, he would be responsible for providing sustenance to his brothers during the years of famine, and he saw this as his opportunity to realize the dream of the sheaves. At the same time, he knew that the spiritual mission of molding the future of the Nation of Israel, the nation that would emerge from himself and his brothers, was also part of his responsibility.

What is the spiritual and educational mission that Yosef must mold? This is the subject of section B.

B. THE WAYS OF REPENTANCE

At the outset, I mentioned that both Abarbanel and the Ba'al ha-Akeida explain Yosef's estrangement from his brothers as arising from his desire to test their repentance for the sin of having sold him. In this section, I shall adopt this approach, combining it with what we saw above concerning the fundamental perception of the Ramban.

I shall divide the discussion of repentance into two sections. In the first, I shall demonstrate that the main theme of the story of Yosef and his brothers is the process of repentance; in the second, I shall depict - in light of this repentance - Yosef's meeting with his brothers in Egypt.

THE REPENTANCE OF YEHUDA AND REUVEN

The sin of Yosef's brothers in selling him is not one of the milder misdeeds of Sefer Bereishit. This sin - selling a free man into slavery - is considered in the Torah and Prophets (Shemot 21:16; 20:13; Devarim 27:7; Yoel 4; Amos 2:6-10; and

many more) as one of the most severe sins that can be committed. It is comparable to the sin of Kayin and the sins of the generation of the Flood, the generation of the Tower of Babel, and the people of Sedom. It is only natural that the punishments meted out to Kayin, to the generation of the Flood and to the people of Sedom should be replaced here by the repentance of Yosef's brothers. This repentance is one of the foundations upon which all of Sefer Bereishit rests - together with the punishment of sinners - and it should not be presented as an insignificant detail related only in connection with Yosef's mistake. The story of the brothers' repentance is equal in weight and importance to the story of the Flood and the overturning of Sedom - if not greater than them.

The story of the sale of Yosef begins, according to Chazal (Bereishit Rabba 64, 19) with the description of Reuven dressed in sackcloth and fasting over his sin with Bilha, with God praising him for this repentance. Adjacent to the sale, we read the story of Yehuda and Tamar, with Yehuda ultimately admitting his wrongdoing, and Yaakov praising him for this (Rashi, 49:9).

Reuven and Yehuda are both contenders for the leadership of the family, after Yaakov ceases to function as the leader and after Shimon and Levi are removed from the leadership race. The rivalry between Reuven and Yehuda finds expression in the argument over Yosef's fate (37:22, 26-27), in the recognition of the sin of selling him (42:22 as opposed to 44:16), in assuming responsibility for Binyamin in Egypt (42:37 as opposed to 43:8-55), and in Yaakov's blessings to them, as well as in other places further on in the Torah.

It seems clear that the process of repentance undertaken by Reuven and Yehuda concurrently is part of the rivalry for leadership. This understanding is supported by a comparison between the two sins: Reuven wears sackcloth and fasts over having cohabited with his father's concubine (as the literal text describes it), while Yehuda admits to having cohabited with his son's wife.

At first glance, these two sins appear to have no connection with the sale of Yosef. But upon closer examination, we discover that this is not the case. Chazal, in the midrash quoted above, connect Reuven's sackcloth and fasting with the episode of the sale of Yosef. In the deed concerning Bilha - both according to the literal text, according to which Reuven meant to take over his father's hegemony while he was still alive, and according to the Midrash (Shabbat 55b) - Reuven, the firstborn of the less-loved Leah, meant to emerge the chosen son, rather than Yosef - firstborn of the beloved Rachel. The attempt to save Yosef, with his dreams of rulership (37:20), was part of Reuven's repentance for what he did with Bilha.

Similarly, the story of Tamar is also linked to the sale of Yosef, through the juxtaposition of the two episodes in the text. The chain of tragedies that befall Yehuda - the loss of his wife and two sons - is undoubtedly a punishment for the sale of Yosef. Reuven, who will one day make the peculiar offer of allowing Yaakov to put his (Reuven's) two sons to death if he fails to bring Binyamin back from Egypt (42:37), apparently draws this idea from Yehuda's punishment for the sale of Yosef into Egyptian slavery - the death of his two sons. This terrible

punishment for that dreadful sin is engraved deeply in the brothers' consciousness, and Reuven accepts it upon himself if he should abandon Binyamin in Egypt.

But at the beginning of the story, Yehuda never imagines that his sons have died because of his sin. The Midrash describes how Yehuda declares that "is known to be one whose husbands die" (Rashi 38:11). Only after he is forced to recognize her innocence does he admit, "She has been more righteous than I" (38:26). Only then does he realize that it is not she who is responsible for the death of her two successive husbands, but rather Yehuda himself who is responsible for the death of his two sons, for the sin is his. With this admission, he begins rebuilding his shattered household.

The process of repentance continues to accompany the brothers later on. The decree by the Egyptian viceroy that Rachel's second son, Binyamin, must be brought to Egypt is an instant reminder to them of the sale of Yosef to Egypt. Once again, the two contenders - Reuven and Yehuda - react, and once again, in a similar way to the previous story. Reuven sees only the punishment for their sin; he makes no attempt to suggest any repair:

"Reuven answered them, saying: Did I not tell you, saying, 'Do not sin against the child' - and you did not listen, and behold, now his blood is required." (42:22)

Yehuda, in contrast, admits the sin, and also proposes a positive path of repentance: a corresponding sacrifice, rather than "sackcloth and fasting" which represent only mourning and acceptance of the Divine decree:

"They tore their garments... Yehuda said: 'What shall we say to my lord; what can we speak and what justification can we offer? God has found the sin of your servants; behold, we are servants to my master...' (44:13-16).

And later on:

"Now, let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my master; let the boy go up with his brothers." (44:33)

From Yehuda's words, we see that he did not admit to Binyamin having stolen the royal goblet; he treats the story as a plot against them. For if this were not so, there would be no significance to the story of bringing Binyamin down to Egypt, nor to the proposed exchange of Binyamin for Yehuda. This being the case, Yehuda's words, "God has found the sin of your servants," can refer only to the sale of Yosef (and not the "sin" of Binyamin's theft).

"I AM YOSEF, YOUR BROTHER"

We have attempted, then, to prove that all of the brothers' actions - and particularly those of the two leaders, Reuven and Yehuda - are influenced and dictated by the sin of selling Yosef and the need to atone for it. Our impression is that the ultimate structure of the family and the fate of the brothers depends on their repentance being accepted. Yosef knows this, and regards himself as a partner in this process - both because of his close (passive) connection with the sin, and because of his constant feeling, especially because of his dreams, that he is responsible for the future of Yaakov's family.

Perhaps Yosef was troubled by the brothers' terrible sin and the prospects for the future of Yaakov's household no less than he was concerned for his own personal fate. From the time he is sold, he begins to build - along with his own personal life - the process of reunification of the family. It is preferable that this reunification not be forced upon the brothers, but rather that it be brought about through good will and love. If Yosef would send a messenger to his father, letting him know that he was still alive, Yaakov would admittedly have redeemed him from Egypt and restored him to the family as a free person, but he would still be hated by his brothers, the sons of Leah, and there would be no guarantee that they would not make further attempts to rid themselves of him. Yosef did not want such a situation; he wanted a reunification based on the brothers' regret for their sin and arising from their complete repentance.

In my view, Yosef believed in his ability to create such a process - or at least to test whether it existed. When his dreams would be realized, and his brothers would come and bow before him as a lord and ruler, he would have the power to create almost any process he chose; no one could stand against him. Having witnessed his speedy promotion to head of Potifar's household, and later to head of all the prisoners in the jail, he knows that God is with him.

I shall now address the question of how Yosef led the brothers to admit to their sin against him and to repent for it. First, concerning Yosef's priorities, let us address a question raised by many commentators, following the Ramban's line: was it really moral of Yosef to prolong the many years of his father's anguish just in order to cause his brothers to admit to their sin?

In my view, this claim is difficult to understand. Should Yosef then have left his brothers with their sin and perpetuated for all eternity the spiritual division of Yaakov's household, just in order to save Yaakov anguish? Should Yaakov's anguish not be viewed as pain for the purpose of healing? Is it not preferable that Yosef save Yaakov the pain of discovering, at the end of his life, that his children were not what he thought they were? Was R. Eliezer ben Horkenus wrong for going to study Torah against the wishes of his father, instead of plowing his father's field? Was Rachel, the daughter of Kalba Savu'a, wrong for marrying the shepherd Akiva ben Yosef ([Ketubot 62b](#)) against the wishes of her father?

C. THE PLAN

How did Yosef intend to redirect his brothers from the sinful path of hatred, selling their brother and lying to their father, to the path of repair and repentance?

Before addressing this question, let us first address a puzzling element in the story of the meeting between Yosef and his brothers when the latter come to receive grain. The Torah elaborates at length on how Yosef accuses his brothers of spying and how they attempt to justify themselves and prove that this accusation is unfounded. Could this dialogue actually have taken place in reality as it is described? How could it be that not a single one of the brothers sensed that perhaps this was a pre-planned, staged performance, whose purpose was not to arrest spies?

As mentioned, my assumption is that Yosef began to plan the encounter with his brothers already when he interpreted Pharaoh's dream and understood that, as viceroy, his brothers' sheaves would come to bow before his own sheaf, to eat from his table.

INVESTIGATION OF YOSEF'S BROTHERS

Yosef's plan was aimed at saving Egypt during the years of famine, but at the same time he was also planning a way to bring his dreams to realization. The Divine spirit within him goaded him to plan a way of leading the brothers to correct their ways, and a way of testing whether they had indeed done this.

Yosef knew that sooner or later his brothers would arrive, seeking food, and thus the dream of the sheaves would be fulfilled. The second dream - with the stars bowing before him - would be realized only when he would be able to bring about the hoped-for spiritual process of saving the brothers from the abyss of their sin; only thus would the family be able to be reunited in the proper way (not artificially), so that Yaakov would die knowing that all his children were worthy heirs of his heritage.

Perhaps this is how Yosef prepared his trap. Many citizens must have been questioned during the first few years of the famine, while Yosef was busy nationalizing all property, for fear of an uprising against the regime. It seems that the suspicions were more serious concerning foreigners, who may have arrived in some or other disguise. Perhaps Yaakov's sons - particularly Shimon and Levi - were naturally regarded with caution in foreign lands after what they had cunningly perpetrated in Shekhem. Their entry into Egypt through - according to Chazal - different entry points, was also not counted in their favor as soon as they were identified as brothers. As if this were not enough, the brothers were also found to be expressing particular interest in the fate of a slave who had been brought to Egypt some twenty-two years previously. From the perspective of the Egyptian security services, these men were trying to glean details about the Egyptian viceroy - the king's second-in-command. For this reason, they were clearly suspicious, and there was no difficulty in having them imprisoned without Yosef having to disclose his true intent.

We may assume that the brothers were separated from one another and placed in different cells, so that their testimonies could be compared against each other. In their interrogation,

they were questioned as to every possible aspect concerning their family and their aims. Perhaps they underwent torture and were forced to tell every detail. Because of their inability to coordinate their testimonies, they had no choice but to tell the truth. It quickly became apparent that, in addition to the ten "suspects" that the security services were holding, there were another two suspects that had not yet been caught. The entire security system (directed and staged by Yosef, of course) was put on alert in order to arrest the two missing "prime suspects," whom the brothers were stubbornly protecting, denying that they had come with them to Egypt. In their interrogation, it was discovered that all the brothers gave the same story about Binyamin, but perhaps there were contradictions as to the fate of Yosef. The brothers must certainly have mumbled and stammered, ashamed to admit that they had sold him into slavery. The interrogators noted the discrepancies in the different versions of what they said, and their suspicions deepened. Each of the brothers was taken to his cell and beaten severely, with the demand that he answer the question, "Where is Yosef?" By the time the brothers met again, three days later, they understood very well the reason for the punishment that had befallen them:

"They said to each other: But we are guilty on account of our brother, for we saw his distress when he pleaded to us but we did not listen; therefore this trouble has come upon us." (42:21)

Yosef demonstrates generosity towards them and does not demand that they bring their lost brother. However, he is insistent that they bring the remaining brother - Binyamin - to ensure that there are no other spies roaming around in Egypt.

THE PLAN IS UPSET

Yosef's strategy is well-thought out, but it is upset. Yosef is deeply moved by Reuven's words to his brothers:

"Reuven answered them and said: Did I not tell you, saying, 'Do not sin against the boy' - but you did not listen; now behold, his blood is required." (42:22)

When Yosef hears this, he goes off to a quiet corner and **WEEPS FOR THE FIRST TIME**. But he knows that this is not enough. Reuven's reaction, and the reaction of the rest of the brothers, is an acceptance of their punishment for their sin, but this falls short of representing true 'tikkun' (repair). Yosef leads the brothers into a test concerning Binyamin. In my view, his intention was not to cause Binyamin to be brought to Egypt, but rather the exact opposite! Yosef demonstrates to them, by means of his whole carefully staged performance, that the purpose of bringing Binyamin is so that he can be interrogated in the Egyptian dungeon, on suspicion of spying. It is clear to everyone that if Binyamin is brought to him, it may not be possible to get him out of there and return him to his father. It is for this reason that Yaakov is so reluctant to send Binyamin (who is already past the age of thirty, and is father to ten sons),

and it is for this reason that Reuven and Yehuda must offer such great commitments to guard him.

Despite all of this, will the brothers bring Binyamin to Egypt? Yosef expects that the brothers will protect Binyamin and not lead him into the danger awaiting him in Egypt at the hands of the viceroy. He expects that they will prefer to remain hungry in Canaan, even leaving Shimon in the Egyptian jail, so long as Binyamin will not be in danger. Yosef is prepared to regard this as repentance and 'tikkun' for what the brothers had done to him.

Indeed, for a long while the brothers do not return with Binyamin in tow. Perhaps Yosef is already on the point of revealing his identity to Shimon and telling him about the test that he had set up for the brothers. Perhaps he is on the point of sending for his father and brothers, calling them to come and make peace. One could ask: what proof has he as to any 'tikkun' on the part of the brothers? After all, it is quite likely that it is their father who is refusing to allow them to take Binyamin. But Yosef knows well that Yaakov is no longer the real leader of the family. Just as they had deceived him as to the sale of Yosef, so they could find a way to bring Binyamin to Egypt, if they so chose.

But then the brothers return, and Binyamin is with them! At first, Yosef believes that they are repeating the sin of his sale; he expresses his disappointment in **WEeping FOR A SECOND TIME**:

"Yosef hurried - for his mercy was aroused towards his brother - and he sought to weep; he came into the chamber and wept there." (43:30)

Why was Yosef's mercy aroused towards Binyamin? Binyamin had grown up with his father, had established a large family, and was living well. It was Yosef himself who was deserving of pity: why is he, who was taken from his father's home and thrown into a pit in the valley of Dotan, and then into the dungeon in the house of the captain of the guard, now crying for Binyamin?

In my view, when Binyamin was brought to Egypt, this signaled to Yosef that Binyamin, too, was still not loved by his half-brothers. He deduces that Binyamin, too, is persecuted and hated. He concludes that the hand of Yehuda - who wanted to sell him - prevailed over the hand of Reuven - who wanted to save him. He has no knowledge of the terrible guarantee that Yehuda supplied in order to take Binyamin.

Nevertheless, Yosef's caution prevents him from drawing conclusions too hastily. He decides to test the brothers once more - through the plot of the goblet. Stealing the goblet used by the ruler for divining would clearly verify the suspicion of spying. He causes Binyamin to be "caught," and has him returned to the viceroy's palace.

This time, Yosef presents the brothers with a more difficult test. He causes the brothers to envy Binyamin, just as they once envied Yosef himself. He demonstrates greater affection for

Binyamin than for them, allotting him a five-fold ration (43:34). He even gives them reason to hate Binyamin - "thief of the divining goblet" - for embroiling them once again in the suspicion of espionage. Finally, he tests their reaction to his desire to make Binyamin an eternal slave in Egypt.

The similarity to the story of Yosef's sale is as close as it could possibly be. The brothers tear their garments, just as they once stripped Yosef of his coat, and Yehuda joins Reuven in accepting their punishment:

"Yehuda said: What shall we say to my lord; how shall we speak and how shall we justify ourselves? God has found the sin of your servants; behold, we are slaves to my master - both we and he in whose hands the goblet was found." (49:16)

Even this is not enough - until Yehuda's emotional speech. In this speech, Yosef suddenly learns of Yehuda's guarantee for Binyamin's safety. Suddenly he understands: they have not brought him down to Egypt with a view to abandoning him. Yehuda is prepared to be enslaved for the rest of his life in place of Binyamin. He is ready to give up his life for his half-brother, and to spare his father anguish. He is prepared to accept full justice - measure for measure - for selling Yosef to Egypt, and to become - in place of Yosef and Binyamin - a slave there forever. **NOW YOSEF WEEPS FOR THE THIRD TIME**. This weeping - the hardest and the longest - is where he reveals his identity to his brothers. Here, finally, it is not only "sheaves" that are bowing before him - men seeking food - but shining stars, brothers who have taken the path of "tikkun."

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