

Ws Vavigash 5784: Can we criticise Joseph, or do the ends justify the means?

## Bereishit (Genesis) 47:13-27

(13) Now there was no bread in all the world, for the famine was very severe; both the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. (14) Joseph gathered in all the money that was to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, as payment for the rations that were being procured, and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's palace. (15) And when the money gave out in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us bread, lest we die before your very eyes; for the money is gone!" (16) And Joseph said, "Bring your livestock, and I will sell to you against your livestock, if the money is gone." (17) So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for the horses, for the stocks of sheep and cattle, and the asses; thus he provided them with bread that year in exchange for all their livestock. (18) And when that year was ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, "We cannot hide from my lord that, with all the money and animal stocks consigned to my lord, nothing is left at my lord's disposal save our persons and our farmland. (19) Let us not perish before your eyes, both we and our land. Take us and our land in exchange for bread, and we with our land will be serfs to Pharaoh; provide the seed, that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become a waste." (20) So Joseph gained possession of all the farm land of Egypt for Pharaoh, all the Egyptians having sold their fields because the famine was too much for them; thus the land passed over to Pharaoh. (21) And he removed the population town by town, from one end of Egypt's border to the other. (22) Only the land of the priests he did not take over, for the priests had an allotment from Pharaoh, and they lived off the allotment which Pharaoh had made to them; therefore they did not sell their land. (23) Then Joseph said to the people, "Whereas I have this day acquired you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you to sow the land. (24) And when harvest comes, you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be yours as seed for the fields and as food for you and those in your households, and as

(יג) וְלֶחֶם אֵין בְּכָל־הָאֶָׁרֶץ בִּי־כָבִד הָרָעָב מאָד וַתֻּּלַהּ אָרֵץ מִצְרַיִּם וַאָרֵץ כִּנַּעַן מִפָּנִי הָרָעָב: (יד) וַיְלַקֵּט יוֹסֵׁף אֵת־כָּל־הַכֵּסֵף הַנָּמִצָא בָאַרִץ־מִצְרַיִּם וּבָאַרִץ כִּנַּעַן בַּשֵּׁבֶּר אַשֶׁר־הָם שֹבַרִים וַיַּבָא יוֹסֵף אֵת־הַכֵּסֵף בֵּיתָה פַרְעָה: (טו) וַיִּתְם הַכַּסֵף מֵאָרִץ מָצְרַיִם וּמֵאֲרֵץ כִּנֵעַן וַיַּבֹאוּ כָּל־מִצְרַיִם אַל־יוֹסַף לאמר הַבַה־לֵנוּ לְחֵם וַלְמַה נַמְוּת נָגָדֶךְ כִּי אַפָּס כַּסֵף: (טז) וַיָּאמֶר יוֹסֵף הָבִוּ מִקְנֵיכֶּם וְאֶתְּנָה לָכֶם בְּמִקְנֵיכֶם אָם־אַפַס כַּסָף: (יז) וַיַּבֵיאוּ אֵת־מִקנֵיהֶם ּ אַל־יוֹסֶףְ וַיָּתֵּן לַהֶם יוֹסֶף לֶחֶם בַּסּוּסִים וּבְמַקנָה הַצָּאן וּבִמְקנָה הַבַּקר וּבַחַמֹרִים וִינַהַלֶּם בַּלֶּחָם בָּכֶל־מִקְנֵהֶם בַּשַּׁנָה הָהוא: (יח) וַתִּתֹם הַשָּׁנָה הַהָּוֹא וַיַּבֹאוּ אֵלְיו בַּשַׁנֵה הַשַּׁנִית וַיִּאמִרוּ לוֹ לְא־נְכַחֵד מֵאֲדֹנִי ַכֵּי אָם־תַּם הַבֶּּסֶף וּמָקנָה הַבִּהֵמָה אֵל־אַדֹנִי לָא נִשְׁאַר לְפָנֵי אֲדֹנִי בִּלְתָּי אָם־גּוְיַתְנוּ ואַדְמַתָנוּ: (יט) לַמַה נַמִוּת לְעִינֵיךְ גַם־אַנַּחָנוּ גַּם אַדְמַתֶנוּ קנָה־אֹתָנוּ ואַת־אַדְמָתָנוּ בַּלֵּחָם וְנָהִיֵּה אַנָחִנוּ ואַדְמָתֵנוּ עַבָדֵים לְפַרְעֹה וְתֵן־זָׁרַע וְנָחִיֵה ולא נְמוּת וְהַאָּדָמָה לֹא תַשָּׁם: (כ) וַיּקּוֹ יוֹסֶׁף אֵת־כַּל־אַדְמֵת מִצְרַיִּם לְפַרְעֹה כִּי־מַכְרָוּ מִצְרַיָּם אָישׁ שַׂלָּהוּ כִּי־חַזָק עַלֵהָם הַרַעַב וַתָּהִי הַאָרַץ לְפַרְעָה: (כא) וְאֶּת־הָעָָם הָעֱבִיר אֹתְוֹ לֶעָרִים מִקְצֵה גְבוּל־מִצְרָיִם וְעַד־קָּצְהוּ: (כב) בֶּק אַדְמַת הַכּהָנִים לֹא קַנָה כִּי חֹק לַכּהַנִּים מֵאֵת פַרעה ואַכלוּ אַת־חַקַם אַשַּׁר נַתַן לַהָם' פַּרִעֹה עַל־בֶּון לָא מַכִרְוּ אֵת־אַדְמַתָּם: (כג) וַיָּאמֵר יוֹסֵף אֵל־הָעָֹם הֵן בּוֹנִיתִי אֵתְכֵם הַנִּוֹם וְאֵת־אַדְמַתְכֵם לְפַרְעָה הָא־לְכֵם זַּׁרַע וּזְרַעָּתָּם אֵת־הָאַדָמָה: (כד) וְהָיָהֹ בַּתִּבוּאֹת וּנִתַתָּם חַמִּישִׁית לְפַּרְעָה וְאַרְבָּע הַיַּדֹת יָהֵיָה לָכֵם לֹוַרַע הַשָּׂדָה וְלְאָכִלְכָם וְלַאֲשֵׁר בָּבַתֵּיכֵם וְלֵאֵכְל לְטַפָּבֵם: (כה) וַיֹּאמְרְוּ ָהֶחֶיָתָנוּ נִמְצָא־חֵן בְּעִינֵי אֲדֹנִי וְהָיִינוּ

nourishment for your children." (25) And they said, "You have saved our lives! We are grateful to my lord, and we shall be serfs to Pharaoh." (26) And Joseph made it into a land law in Egypt, which is still valid, that a fifth should be Pharaoh's; only the land of the priests did not become Pharaoh's. (27) Thus Israel settled in the country of Egypt, in the region of Goshen; they acquired holdings in it, and were fertile and increased greatly.

עַבָדֶים לְפַּרְעָה: (כו) וַיָּשֶׂם אֹתָהּ יוֹסֵׁף לְחֹלְ עַד־הַיּוֹם הַנֵּה עַל־אַדְמַת מִצְרָיִם לְפַרְעָה לַחָמֶשׁ רֵץ אַדְמַת הַכְּהָנִים לְבַדָּם לָא הָיְתָה לְפַרְעָה: (כז) וַיִּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּאֶרֶץ מִצְּרָיִם בְּאָבֶץ גָּשֶׁן וַיֵּאָחַזִּוּ בָּהּ וַיִּפְרָוּ וַיִּרְבָּוּ מְאָד:

- What characteristics do we see here? What do you make of Yosef's behaviour here? Does he behave well or badly?
- What do you personally want to learn from Yosef through his positive example here?
- Is there anything you want to learn from his negative example?
- What can we learn from this passage in its totality?

## Rashbam 12th C, on verse 21

העביר אותו לערים - כמו שעשה סנחריב, כדכתיב: אל ארץ כארצכם, כדי שלא יטענו בה חזקה איש איש בארצו לאחר מכירה.

העביר אותו לערים, a stratagem also employed by Sancheriv when he conquered the northern Kingdom of Israel and forcibly exchanged the populations of that kingdom with people from the north. (compare Kings II 18,32). The purpose behind this was to prevent uprisings by populations who had no roots in their countries and therefore had no good reason to start a rebellion.