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Sages and novices to *Torah* learning alike, all wonder and struggle to understand why it was that *Yosef*, *Yosef HaTzaddik*, did not attempt to contact his father after he was freed from his Egyptian prison cell. For the entire period of 22 years that *Yosef* was separated from his father, he must have realized his father's anguish in imagining his beloved son to be dead. Doesn't common decency require him to inform his father of his well-being?

Why, then, did he conceal his identity until the very last moment?

The *Ramban* (42:9) believes that *Yosef* understood that his dreams of his family bowing down to him were a prophetic vision. In order to bring about the fulfillment of this *nevuah*, he had no choice but to conceal his identity, despite the regrettable anguish this would cause *Yaakov* and his sons. He needed the story to play out as the dreams foretold.

According to the *Akeidas Yitzchak*, Rabbi Yitzchak Arama (*Shaar* 30), *Yosef* had to place his brothers in a situation where they would be forced to take a stand in *Binyamin's* defense, and thereby genuinely atone for their sins against their "other" brother, *Yosef*. If *Yaakov* knew "the real story", the plan would never come into fruition.

The *Vilna Gaon* offers a seemingly unrelated interpretation in another part of our *parsha* which I believe answers our question. After *Shimon* is taken by *Yosef*, the brothers return to Israel to ask permission to bring *Binyamin* down to Egypt. In response to his sons, *Yaakov* says "You have bereaved me – *Yosef* is gone, *Shimon* is gone and you want to take *Binyamin*! All these troubles have come upon me." (42:36). The *Gaon* focuses on *Yaakov's* last phrase – All these troubles have come upon me – עלי היו כלנה. What does this phrase mean?

The word עלי appears in another context earlier in *Sefer Breishit* (27:13). When *Yaakov* feared that *Yitzchak* would recognize that he was disguised as *Esav*, *Rivka* reassured him that he had nothing to fear. *Rivka* told him, your curse will be upon me – עלי קללתך בני. The *Gra* explains that *Rivka* was informing her son that troubles will only come to him from 3 places – *Esav*, *Lavan* and *Yosef*. Those names are hinted in the anacronym – עלי.

Rivka was expressing to *Yaakov* that he had nothing to fear with respect to tricking *Yitzchak* because only three specific troubles were supposed to affect *Yaakov* during his life. Those troubles would be *Esav*, *Lavan* and *Yosef*.

When the brothers requested to take *Binyamin* to Egypt, *Yaakov* said, “what are you talking about? I am only supposed to agonize due to three people: *Esav*, *Lavan* and *Yosef*. Not *Binyamin*. This is not meant to be.”

Rav Asher Weiss quotes this idea in his *haggada* and adds a beautiful thought expanding the idea of the *Gra*. He writes that *Am Yisrael* faces three unique types of enemies and troubles in our lives.

Esav represents those who want to annihilate us physically, like *Esav* wanted to physically kill *Yaacob*. There are “*Esavs*” throughout the generations who want to annihilate the Jewish people: Haman and Hitler to name a few.

The second type of trouble is that of *Lavan*. His goal was not to kill *Yaakov*; rather, *Lavan* wanted to destroy us spiritually. *Lavan* represents our enemies who wish to do the same, people like *Antiochus* and those who seek to rid the world of Judaism, not necessarily the Jewish people.

Finally, there are the troubles of *Yosef*, which is the problem of *Sinat Chinam*, the inner fighting within *Klal Yisrael*. This is the most insidious because this trouble is brought upon by us. We can’t control whether the world has *Esavs* and *Lavans* roaming the earth but we control the potential presence of “*Yosef*”. We can prevent whether “*Yosef*” exists. We can eradicate him. We must all do our part to enhance *Ahavat Yisrael*.

Based on the understanding of the *Vilna Gaon* and *Rav Asher Weiss*’ expansion of the *Gaon*’s idea, perhaps the reason *Yosef* never contacted his father was because if he did, the story of how he ended up in Egypt would need to come out. The plot of the brothers, the execution of the sale and the chain of events would have all come out and *Yosef* wished to save the family turmoil, animosity and resentment from existing. It would have been inevitable. The brothers and *Yaakov* would have grown apart and *Yosef* wanted none of that. He wanted to create unity and togetherness, not divisiveness and dissension.

Yosef didn't call, write or text because he sought to strengthen relationships and bonds. He wanted to unify and build. Of all of *Yosef's* great accomplishments, his most subtle one might have been his best.

Shabbat Shalom!