

Portrait of a Survivor: Yosef HaTzaddik

Based on shiur by Neima Novetsky

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SOURCES

How Does Yosef Deal with his Lot?

1. Breishit, Ch. 41, v. 46-52

(46) Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt. (47) In the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly. (48) He gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the field, which was around every city, he laid up in the same. (49) Joseph laid up grain as the sand of the sea, very much, until he stopped counting, for it was without number. (50) To Joseph were born two sons before the year of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On, bore to him. (51) Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh, "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." (52) The name of the second, he called Ephraim : "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

2. Breishit, Ch. 42, v. 6-13

6) Joseph saw his brothers, and he recognized them, but acted like a stranger to them, and spoke roughly with them. 7) He said to them, "Where did you come from?" They said, "From the land of Canaan to buy food." (8) Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. (9) Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed about them, and said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land." (10) They said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. (11) We are all one man's sons; we are honest men. Your servants are not spies." (12) He said to them, "No, but you have come to see the nakedness of the land!" (13) They said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more."

3. Breishit, Ch. 42, v. 14-24

(14) Joseph said to them, "It is like I told you, saying, 'You are spies!' (15) By this you shall be tested. By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go out from here, unless your youngest brother comes here. (16) Send one of you, and let him get your brother, and you shall be bound, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you, or else by the life of Pharaoh surely you are spies." (17) He put them all together into custody for three days. (18) Joseph said to them the third day, "Do this, and live, for I fear God. (19) If you are honest men, then let one of your brothers be bound in your prison; but you go, carry grain

for the famine of your houses. (20) Bring your youngest brother to me; so will your words be verified, and you will not die.” They did so. (21) They said one to another, “We are certainly guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us, and we would not listen. Therefore this distress has come upon us.” (22) Reuben answered them, saying, “Did I not tell you, saying, ‘Do not sin against the child,’ and you would not listen? Therefore also, behold, his blood is required.” (23) They did not know that Joseph understood them; for there was an interpreter between them. (24) He turned himself away from them, and wept. Then he returned to them, and spoke to them, and took Simeon from among them, and bound him before their eyes.

4. Breishit, Ch. 43, v. 29-34

29) He lifted up his eyes, and saw Benjamin, his brother, his mother’s son, and said, “Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me?” He said, “God be gracious to you, my son.” (30) Joseph hurried, for his heart yearned over his brother; and he sought a place to weep. He entered into his room, and wept there. (31) He washed his face, and came out. He controlled himself, and said, “Serve the meal.” (32) They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians, that ate with him, by themselves, because the Egyptians do not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. (33) They sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth, and the men marveled one with another. (34) He sent portions to them from before him, but Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as any of theirs. They drank, and were merry with him.

5. Breishit, Ch. 44, v. 1-4

(1) He commanded the steward of his house, saying, “Fill the men’s sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man’s money in his sack’s mouth. (2) Put my cup, the silver cup, in the sack’s mouth of the youngest, with his grain money.” He did according to the word that Joseph had spoken. (3) As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away, they and their donkeys. (4) When they had gone out of the city, and were not yet far off, Joseph said to his steward, “Up, follow after the men. When you overtake them, ask them, ‘Why have you rewarded evil for good?’

Commentators: How to Understand Yosef

Desire for Reconciliation, but first...

A) A Test

6. R. Shmuel ben Chafni Hagaon- Gaon of Sura from 998-1012

But with this, he had no way of asking them about their mercy or regret, or if they had continued (in wickedness) and so he turned to them in speech to force them to reveal these things....

7. *Philo* on Joseph:29- 1st century commentator from Egypt

But all this conduct was but an experiment, just as the former circumstances had been, too, because the governor of the country was desirous to see what kind of good-will they had toward him who was his brother by the same mother. For he had been afraid that they felt some kind of natural dislike toward him....

It was with this view that he both reproached them as spies and inquired about their family, for the sake of knowing whether his brother was still alive, or whether he had been put out of the way by treachery....

And ... while he was feasting them he regaled his own brother by the same mother with more costly viands and luxuries than the rest, looking carefully at every one of them, and judging from their countenances whether here was any envy secretly cherished in their hearts. and when he saw them all cheerful, and all eager, and earnest for the honor of the youngest, conjecturing now by two strong proofs that there was no hatred smoldering beneath, he devised a third mode of trial likewise, bringing a charge against their youngest brother, that he appeared to have committed a theft; for this was likely to be the clearest possible proof of the disposition of each of them and of the affection which they bore to their brother, who was thus falsely accused....

B) Help the Brothers Attain Tshuva

8. *Abarbanel* - b. 1437 Lisbon, d. 1508 in Venice

And it seems to me that the hiding of his identity and harsh speech was for two purposes: The first: Yosef was wise and knew that Hashem had sent him before his brothers and father as a savior, that it had all been from Hashem that his brothers had sold him, so that he could bring them good.... But nonetheless, they were worthy of punishment due to their evil intent.... And so he acted against them measure for measure... for it was better that they receive punishment at his hand and be atoned for sin, than be punished from heaven.

Desire for Vengeance?

9. *Radak*- Rabbi David Kimhi, b.1160, d.1235, France

That he dreamed: because for them had been the dreams, and they hated him for them, and when he remembered all they did he caused them angst and torment.

But see

10. *Ibn Kaspi*- b. 1279, d. 1340, France

Ibn Kaspi questions this reading, suggesting that it is impossible that Yosef would really act out vengeance, given the [Torah] prohibition [against it].

Yosef Wants to Forget

11. Yisroel Eldad

Why did he call his firstborn Menashe? "Because G-d made me forget...." With wondrous openness, for which the *Tanakh* is exemplary, and with concise and concrete language, here we see an expression of the deep desire to forget that has pulsed every "tzafenat" (hidden one) throughout history, in every exile.... Yosef had come to terms with being "Tzafenat" for the remainder of his days. He no longer wanted to know anything of his family's house....

12. Dovid Henshkah

It seems as if this is how one must explain the matter: Not only is the story of Yosef and his brothers a tale of the brothers' repentance, but one of their repentance on one hand, and Yosef's on the other. For, one must understand that Yosef in Egypt after the cruel break from his family, was still a young man, full of vitality, longing for life.... He sees no chance of ever returning to his father's house, and if he desires life, he must integrate into Egyptian society. On the other hand, it is clear that he cannot and does not want to be freed from the basic values that his father instilled in him.... and now beings a major struggle in Yosef's heart. At times he sees himself as an Egyptian, his father's house becomes identified with all his travail from which he is slowly freeing himself as if from a bad dream. And then, suddenly, his family reappears, his earlier dreams come to fruition. His first reaction: to act as a stranger. Will his brothers force him to identify himself with them? To return to all his travails? No. In the meantime, he has solidified his status as an Egyptian. He wants nothing to do with his brothers, those who hated and sold him.... But looking at his brothers, he thinks, maybe though, he can somehow bring Binyomin to him....

It was All a Misunderstanding

13. *Shafan haSofer* (paraphrased)

According to me, all the deeds and all the plots in this matter, all of them stemmed from a huge mistake on the part of Yosef, in how he understood the reason for his sale. He, in his righteousness, never dreamed that all 10 of his brothers could be so evil in their jealousy.... he never suspected them. But he thought that the decree was from his father, who had wanted to punish him by selling him as a slave in return for his arrogance in thinking that he would rule over his father and siblings. And so he thought his father sought to punish him measure for measure...