

## Miketz - Rabbi Lerner - December 18, 2011

### The Brothers Come to Egypt and Confront Yosef

42:1: *Yaacov perceived that there is grain in Egypt and he asks his sons why they are acting in such a conspicuous manner?* **Oznayim LaTorah:** What is so unusual that Yaacov sees and why is it that Yaacov sees the problem, rather than his sons? There was something happening that was very strange in Yaacov's eyes - there were many past famines in the land and you could not go down to buy provisions in Egypt and then return to the land of Canaan - otherwise Avraham would have done that, and Yitzchak would have wanted to do that instead of go to the land of the Pelishtim - or they could have sent agents there to buy for them. Apparently it was a stipulation that Egypt would not allow food to leave the land. It was only Yosef who changed this policy and did not mandate that everyone first have to move to Egypt; he was being kind to all of the surrounding areas, letting them buy food and further enrich his land with the sale of food. There is a pasuk in Mishlei that says *Those who deny grain impoverish themselves and are cursed; the blessing should come to the provider.* The first part of the pasuk is a reference to Pharaoh who would not sell food to outsiders; the second part of the pasuk referred to Yosef who provided food to the whole world. So, this was a chidush to Yaacov.

Why didn't his children see this? **Oznayim LaTorah:** the sons tried to avoid going to Egypt, the land to where they sold their brother; when they heard Yaacov mention that they should go to Egypt to buy food, they start to shudder and say it is the most risky, treacherous journey for them - that is where they consigned Yosef, that is the place where their guilt is most evident, and that is where the Satan will attack them most easily. They feel uncomfortable with the idea of going down, and make faces at each other; Yaacov sees them acting funny and asks why are they looking at each other and sending these silent messages. **Sforno:** they were looking at each other; **Targum Ben Uziel** - he asked them why they are so frightened about going down to Egypt, he is wondering about their behavior.

42:2: *And he said, I have heard there are provisions in Egypt, Redu - go down there so that we may buy provisions and survive and not die.*

42:3: *The ten brothers of Yosef went down to buy grain.* Why did it change from the sons of Yaacov to the brothers of Yosef? Once they had been forced to go to Egypt, they did Teshuvah and decided to go on a rescue mission, to do Tikun for their sin and rescue him at all costs.

**Rabbeinu Bachya:** 42:2 What does the word Shever - provisions - mean? It can mean provisions. But, this word for grain and food can mean something else - it contains a hint of destruction in the word as well - a hint of the slavery to come. That is why it also says Redu, go down. But, the bottom line is the end of the pasuk that says even though the years of slavery will be difficult and painful, we will survive and not die.

**Rabbeinu Bachya:** 42:6: Why is Yosef running the store? He is the most powerful man in the land and he is behind the counter making all of the sales? That is how the empire of Egypt works, that the emperor is selling all of the food in the land? The way it worked is that Yosef set up a special system, knowing that the other nations would not have food and he stockpiled the food, it was a plan for him to use to feed all of the nations, forcing all of the families to come down (**Medrash Tanchuma**) to buy food - he figured Yaacov would be too old and would send his sons. He instructed the border police to record all of the information of those coming to buy food; each night they would bring the reports of all new visitors to him. The brothers had spread

out, coming through a different port of entry in order to try to find Yosef. When Yosef sees all of these names, clearly his brothers, he gave instructions that when these names show up to buy grain, he should be notified and he wants to see them; they should be brought to him; that is how they end up in the prime minister's office.

42:6: ...*The brothers bow down to him with their faces to the ground.* **Rashi:** they completely fell down on their faces, which is always implied by the language of Hishtachavu, as per the Rambam (Korim is bowing at the knees; Keidu is bowing to the floor; Hishtachavu is completely on the floor with our faces to the ground). This pasuk is the proof for the meaning of this word.

42:7-8: *Yosef recognizes them and treats them harshly. They did not recognize him; he was also talking through a translator.* Yosef will not immediately identify himself and will put them through a whole trial of their character.

**Ramban:** What compelled Yosef to do this was that he realized he did not just have dreams, but prophecy; that is why he felt he had to reveal the dreams to his brothers (**Rosh:** he was a Navi and was not permitted to withhold the prophecy). All of what happens from this point on is related to Yosef trying to fulfill the dreams. This would explain a difficult point: he was nearly the head person in Egypt - how is it that he remained for years out of communication with his father; he could have visited or sent messengers all of these years to relieve his father's anxiety; even if it was a year's journey, he should have stopped his father's aveilus. He understood that he could not go to Yaacov until the dreams were fulfilled - they could not take place in Eretz Canaan, but had to happen in Egypt. As soon as Yosef heard Pharaoh's dreams, he knew that this was the way to get his dreams to come true. When they bowed down, the first dream was not completely fulfilled, because Binyamin was missing; that is why Yosef engineered getting them to bring him down to him, keeping a hostage to induce them to do this. After this, he would make an attempt to get the second dream fulfilled.

42:9: *Yosef remembers the dreams.* This would seem to support the Ramban, and many meforshim agree. **Sforno:** he now must fulfill the dreams; Yosef has to figure out a way to get this to happen. **Ohr Hachayim:** all of his actions are about fulfilling the dreams and getting Yaacov to come down to Egypt. **Netziv:** After getting Binyamin to come down, he has to get Yaacov to come down; not only was Yosef mandated to tell the brothers his dream, but he felt he had to help implement these dreams. This concept is debated strongly, with many meforshim questioning this - since when does a Navi have to worry about fulfilling the message, particularly at such a high cost to his family, especially his father? He violated Kibud Av to fulfill this revelation. This is unprecedented. How else can we understand Yosef's actions?

**Kli Yakar:** the reason he will not yet reveal to his father that he is alive is because Hashem has not revealed it to Yaacov; these years were supposed to be punishment to Yaacov, as a midah kaneged midah, because he stayed away from his father for 22 years. When Yosef sees his father is still in the dark, despite Yaacov being a Navi, he assumes that the time has not yet been completed; how can he reveal what Hashem has not? It must be exactly 22 years, and that is why he has not revealed himself to his brothers; if God has not revealed, than how can he? What about torturing his brothers? That is a completely different reason - it is about Teshuva, to get them to be rehabilitated.

**Nachama Leibowitz:** Yosef's actions can be explained this way: This will be a test of Teshuva Gemurah, placing someone in the exact same situation that they sinned the first time, to see if they will repeat. Yosef set up the circumstances to see if they would repeat their sin, now with Binyamin, the new favorite of their father. Will they walk away from him as well.

**Rav Hirsch**: wouldn't Yosef have revealed himself just for his father's sake? He needed to be convinced of two things before revealing himself - he needed to formulate a favorable opinion of his brothers and he needed to make sure that his brothers had better feelings about him - the hatred both ways had to be healed, and he felt it necessary to test them, to see how they would behave when a father is being deprived of a son. That was the first part of the test. Until then they had only known Yosef as the food supplier. He would later, after revealing himself to them and bringing all of them down to Egypt, supply them with all of the food and needs they had for years, despite their deserving of punishment; as soon as he revealed himself, he was hoping that the family would all come together again. Yosef held back because it would not be helpful without their doing teshuvah first, because if too early, his father would gain one son and lose 10. His great purpose was to unify the family again, and this was worth the masquerade. He needed to emphasize that they are a unique family that must be unified together as one

**Sefer Chalom HaTeivah**: The **Netziy** in his introduction to sefer Bereishis talks about this being the sefer Hayashar - the Avos loved God and also acted towards the rest of the world, even idolaters and immoral and promiscuous people, with love. They would try to save the evil of the world at all costs. We saw this with Avraham trying to save the idolaters and disgusting people of Sedom. The Torah tells us that Yaacov presented his whole family to Esav at their meeting, except for Yosef - Yosef was not brought to Esav for presentation by his father - Yosef realized what his father was doing and he presented himself to Esav - he ran to bow down to his evil uncle Esav on his own. He recognized his father's character traits, and he knew that the greatest chesed is to do good to those who do evil to you, to your enemy. That is what we learn from Yaacov, and Yosef learned this as well. The Zohar says that the greatness of Yosef is that not only would he not return evil with evil, but he does good to those who harm him. There is a story in the Gemorrah about Rabbi Abu who saw a man fall asleep on a pile of stones, and a serpent approached. Before striking him, a branch fell on the snake, chasing it away. The man startles awake, jumps up right before a wall collapses on him. Rabbi Abu asked him why he warranted being saved twice. He said he never returned evil for evil, and he could not even go to sleep before doing favors for that person who harmed him, even to the point of asking forgiveness from the man. Rabbi Abu said he was a bigger tzaddik than Yosef who would not return evil and only show mercy to his brothers; here this man would return good in place of evil even for strangers.