

By Rabbi
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YOSEF HaTZADDIK: TWO STORIES

Based on the Hashkafa of HaRav Shimon Kessin, SHLIT'A
In Memory of Eliyahu ben Yehuda, Dr. Elliot Hahn

From Parashat Mekaitz until the end of Sefer Bereshit, there are two very separate tracks upon which Yosef's life unfolds. There is Yosef going from being a prisoner to the rank of Prime Minister for the super-power of his day. There is also Yosef, the favorite son of Yaakov, in a battle of wits with his brothers who don't recognize him. Although these two paths are as different as day and night, if we examine them closely, we will see a consistency in Yosef's righteous character that fully justifies the appellation of "Tzadik" appearing after his name.

Before we get into the specifics of Yosef, his relationship with his brothers and his role as Prime Minister, we need clarification regarding the environment Yosef was immersed in decades before the famine brought the world, including his brothers to him. Solely and exclusively because of Yosef's G-d Given wisdom, Egypt had seven years to prepare for the bad times Pharaoh and the entire Egyptian population believed was going to occur. We never hear of any Egyptian resisting the twenty-percent harvest contribution to their government that was stored for the bad times ahead. To the contrary, many went to great lengths beyond the twenty-percent to store extra food for their own personal consumption. The Midrash relates that with onset of the seven-year famine, everyone's private stock spoiled immediately. The entire population of Egypt and the Middle-East was totally dependent on Yosef for their basic sustenance. Logic dictates, and we will see that history proves that Egypt and the world was most appreciative of Yosef's wisdom and efforts on their behalf. Everyone knew that Yosef was an "Ivri", from the family of Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov. Anyone who had a negative impression of what that family status meant had to rethink their position. Egypt may have remained engaged in idol worship, but they also knew at the top of their government, their kingdom, was a man whose religious heritage, spiritual makeup, and ethical value system answered to a higher authority. The Midrash and Chazal relate the profound respect Pharaoh had for Yosef. It begins with the clarity with which he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams. Pharaoh eventually comes to know that Yosef was fluent in all seventy languages, one more than Pharaoh. His interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams was conveyed in a manner that was both brilliant and yet, not threatening or condescending to the status of Pharaoh as king of Egypt. It was not that Yosef played the political game well. To Yosef, this was not a game at all, but the beginning of a relationship that appears to have morphed from king and subject to a quasi-father / quasi-son type of relationship. There is a very simple proof for this. No statement or hint appears anywhere in these three parshiyot indicating anything less than complete trust by Pharaoh toward Yosef. Pharaoh turns the keys of financial wellbeing of the entire country over to Yosef. When Egyptians confront Pharaoh regarding the famine, he sends them to Yosef with full confidence that everything will be handled properly. If a conflict arises between Yosef and the Egyptian people, Pharaoh always sides with Yosef. We never hear of Pharaoh following up with Yosef, checking to make sure everything is OK. He trusts Yosef not as a partner in the government process or as a servant, but like a trusted son with whom he can leave the business of his kingdom, without one iota of worry.

What did Pharaoh see in Yosef that warranted this cherished relationship, this gifted treatment? What he saw was a man of G-d who possessed a great amount of "chayn", favor. Yes, Pharaoh may have had his idol-worship practices, his pseudo-relationship with Amun, the god of kings, and Ra, the sun god. Nonetheless, he saw within Yosef HaTzadik a man who, guided by his G-d, the One and Only Hashem Yisborach of all reality - finite, Infinite and Beyond - spiritual character that was beyond reproach. In Yosef, Pharaoh saw the theory and practice of G-dliness come to life. A man of this caliber could only act in the manner described above. To not extend complete trust to Yosef would have been foolish because with that trust in place came the best possible result to any problem Pharaoh would face. This was the character Yosef brought to Egypt as an eighteen-year old lad.

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This was the character with which he served Potiphar and the prison warden he answered to. In the coming weeks we will understand how very important Yosef's character was and the role it could have had in shaping our Geulah from Egypt.

There is an obvious question we can ask about this. Pharaoh had a gifted vision of who Yosef was. Did this vision filter down to the general population? Although some may have viewed Yosef as did Pharaoh, the general population probably looked askance at him. (This question must make one wonder what today's American media would have said about Yosef!!) There is a simple proof for the negativity. Egypt was about two years into the famine when Yosef's brothers arrived to purchase food for the second time. Unlike their first trip, Binyomin was now part of the entourage. Tables were set, and the family was seated. We know that every word in the Torah is carefully weighed. There is not one extra letter to be found. Why, therefore, does the Torah treat us to a class in sociology in the middle of verse 43:32? "...and the Egyptians that eat with him alone, because Egyptians are not able to eat bread with *Ivrim* because it is an abomination to Egyptians". How many "*Ivrim*" were there in the world at that time? At most, there were sixty-nine *Ivrim*. How do we understand the sociological establishment of a national abomination when Egyptians eat with an *Ivri*? Here is a modern day parallel. How would an American respond to the House of Representatives and the Senate passing a law outlawing the sharing of a meal with the entire Gomez family living in the southwest corner of Mexico? Does Congress have nothing better to do with its time? For those who claim the reason for the "law" was because *Ivrim* raised sheep that the Egyptians worshipped as a god, that reality was irrelevant because there were no *Ivrim* in Egypt. Yosef was never involved in this. Therefore, how do we understand this principle? It is apparent that the same racism that exists today may have existed then. Hating a person or a specific group because they are different than us and are thereby perceived as a threat to our wellbeing was a threat to Egyptian society that manifested itself in these types of social mores. Dining with a member of a group that totals sixty-nine people is contrary to the norms of Egyptian society for reasons that will be uncovered over the next few weeks. We will learn the real purpose behind the 400 years we were destined to "serve" in Egypt. It will become clear what we were there to accomplish, and why, even in our infancy as a nation to be, there was stress between Egypt and Israel.

It's clear that from the moment Yosef arrived in Egypt, Hashem was with him. He was blessed with "*chayn*", commonly translated as "favor". On the one hand, everyone who met Yosef liked him. They found him to be charming and trustworthy. Pharaoh's willingness to entrust his kingdom to Yosef followed exactly what Potiphar and the warden of the jail did. On the other hand, everyone knew he was very different. Egypt engaged in idol worship while Yosef remained loyal to the invisible G-d of Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov. What many of us fail to realize is the impact our Avot had on the world. They were world famous personalities, and the truth they espoused was impossible to refute. A

plague came over the house of Pharaoh and was cured immediately when Avrohom prayed, all because of Sarah. Avrohom wiped out the four victorious nations bringing an end to what was World War One, (Bereshit, Chapter 14). Yaakov's sons, Shimon and Levi, wiped out an entire city because their sister was violated. The surrounding cities were powerless to respond to the massacre. The spiritual power of those generations was great. Tell any of them that our G-d did not exist, and they would have laughed you out of the room. Everyone knew who the G-d of our forefathers was. What they believed is that Hashem dispersed His powers to lower being that became the idols they worshipped. Egypt possessed ninety percent of the "*kishuf*", the witchcraft that Hashem authored and made available to the world to see if they would remain dedicated to the truth of His Reality. From the world's perspective, the problem with our Avos was that they were a thorn in the side of mankind. They didn't let go. Their message regarding the Oneness of Hashem constantly and continuously reverberated around the world, and the world knew they spoke Emet. So, when Yosef arrives in Egypt, he comes with this message, this spiritual responsibility the previous generations imposed on mankind. He may have been gifted and charming, but he was seen as different – very different. What everyone feared was that he and his family may have harbored the truth, which in and of itself is not bad. What they feared more is that if Yosef and the three generations preceding him were right, the advantage he may have in harboring the forces of the spiritual world, the blessings of Hashem, may one day come to haunt them. If that's the case, the reality that they possess ninety percent of the *kishuf* found in the world would be rendered irrelevant.

This fear took on a new reality when in a matter of a few hours, Yosef went from prisoner to Pharaoh's right-hand man. How he achieved this impressed Pharaoh but left everyone else terrified. The ability to interpret dreams speaks of a spiritual prowess coveted by everyone. That's why Pharaoh first called his magicians to interpret his dreams. Only after they failed to satisfy Pharaoh's spirit, was Yosef called. What struck Pharaoh regarding Yosef had nothing to do with magic, witchcraft or the like. He realized that Yosef's interpretation of his dreams came from a place associated solely and exclusively with a truth that could only be sourced from Hashem Yisborach. That's why Pharaoh took the unsolicited advice Yosef added to the interpretation of his dreams. In Pharaoh's mind, there was no doubt that Yosef was correct in everything he said and suggested.

What merit did Yosef have that enabled him to go from prisoner to Prime Minister? The Midrash Rabba brings down that because Yosef refused the advances of Aishet Potiphar, he earned everything, measure for measure, *midda k'neged midda*. Since he controlled his passion, his desires, he proved himself worthy in Hashem's Eyes to be a ruler. Yosef did not listen to her, so all of Egypt was forced to listen to him. Yosef left his clothing in her hand, so he was worthy of wearing royal garments. Yosef did not reconsider and walk back to sin with Aishet Potiphar, so he was

worthy of riding on a royal chariot. Because Yosef controlled his thoughts and they remained pure, he was worthy of being wise in the eyes of the Egyptian people. Finally, because Yosef did not bend his neck to take a peak at Potiphar's wife, he wore a royal necklace.

How was Yosef able to refuse the advances of Aishet Potiphar? At that critical moment, the "kloster panim", the facial image of Yaakov appeared to him. All the Torah Yosef learned with his father could not do for him what that snapshot achieved. Today's egocentric world is founded on doing our own thing provided it does not harm anyone else. Yosef's gevurah, his inner strength, was able to reach untold heights because Yosef realized that before he could truly appreciate what answering to Hashem is all about, he first had to answer to his father. If at the end of that fateful day, he could not face Yaakov Avinu, there was no way he could face Hashem Yisborach. Jews are not islands that have the option to reach out to family when something is needed. We are a family unit, indeed, one organism that comes together, that works together to achieve the destiny of Tikkun Olom. We've been doing this as one family for thousands of years and have never forsaken our goal, our destiny. We answer to the generations that precede us!

We may have lost many of our own along the way, a reality that requires perspective. The plague of darkness came at the expense of eighty percent of our people. During the Chanukah era, how many Jews became Hellenists? There is a Holocaust event that puts all of this into perspective. There was a Jewish man clinging to life with countless others in Auschwitz. He had the good fortune of being able to hide the Siddur he came to the camp with. Every day, he charged those around him half their portion of bread to pray from the Siddur. Two men watching the line form to use the siddur were talking. "How sickening it is to see that man take away half of everyone's ration for the use of his Siddur." His friend looked at him and said, "Rather than focus on him, focus on how many are in line, willing to give up half their bread to use the Siddur". We can focus on the eighty percent that died during the plague of darkness, or the twenty percent who, seven weeks later, were privileged to participate in Ma'amad Har Sinai and Kabbalat HaTorah. It's that clarity of vision that Yosef was blessed with. It outweighed the everyday immorality of Egyptian life and culture surrounding him. His father's radiant face, his image and all that it stood for was the barrier between Yosef's future and the sin with which he was tempted. Yosef had the free will to be like the eighty percent that were never convinced they were going to be redeemed, or the Hellenistic Jews who thought there is safety in numbers, in being with the majority. Yaakov's image helped Yosef realize that the pleasure it would have justified may have worked in the moment but would have come at the expense of his future within the context of Knesset Yisroel. Had he sinned, his stone would not have been placed on the Choshen.

The famine arrives, followed shortly thereafter by Yosef's brothers. Within the framework of everything described above, once Yosef's family appears before him, the Torah is devoted ex-

clusively to the interaction that culminates in their reconciliation.

Yosef knew that the famine would bring them down, so he devised a series of laws that would bring them all together. It was permissible to distribute grain to foreigners, something that was never done during any famine prior to this one. A slave was not permitted to purchase grain for his employer. Only the head of a household or family member could purchase grain. This law forced the brothers to make the grain purchase. One could not purchase more grain than one donkey could carry. To feed the entire family, each brother brought one donkey. Grain was sold exclusively for family consumption. It could not be purchased commercially, for the purpose of reselling it. If that law was violated, it carried the death penalty. With this law in place, Yaakov's family could only purchase grain in Egypt. The identity of every person purchasing grain had to be confirmed and recorded on the Egyptian purchasing file. Yosef reviewed this list daily to ascertain if his brothers were there or not. Yosef's son Menashe supervised all sales.

This entire system was devised with two goals in mind: For Yosef to determine his status within the family and if, indeed, he was still part of the family to enable his brothers to repent for what happened decades earlier. Revenge had nothing to do with the way Yosef treated his brothers. To the contrary, his desire to forgive them and love them manifested itself in actions that served as an atonement for what they did. Yosef did not want them to be punished for anything associated with his sale in the next world. They spoke harshly to Yosef, so Yosef speaks harshly to them now. They wanted to kill Yosef, so Yosef found ways of accusing them of capital crimes. The brothers threw him into the pit, so Yosef placed them in jail for three days. Since they sold Yosef, he returned their money to them, so they could be accused of being thieves. Since they cause Yaakov untold amounts of grief, Yosef caused them a ton of grief by accusing them of stealing his silver goblet. In his heart, Yosef made sure that everything was done for the sake of heaven, with no intent for malice or revenge. This is proven by the fact that Yosef had to remove himself on more than one occasion to dry his tears and wash his face. Mercy and compassion bring tears, not anger or malicious intent. Similarly, the moment Shimon, as a prisoner, was no longer before his brothers, he was untied, treated with the greatest respect and given the best food and drink to enjoy. He thought he was headed to prison only to find that the best of what Egypt had to offer was provided.

There is an interesting Midrash that confirms that Yosef could not wait to reveal himself to his brothers. The second time the brothers come to Egypt, they bring Binyamin as required. Everyone is invited for a lavish meal. Yosef seats them around the table according to their status (Yehuda as king), and birth order, (Reuven as bechor). As Yosef proceeds flawlessly, their anxiety level grows. This atoned for the casual meal they enjoyed following the sale of Yosef. Binyamin was seated next to Yosef. During the meal, Yosef asked for an astrological chart that could predict

the future to be brought to him. He asked Binyamin if he knew astrology, which he did. He gave Binyamin the map and suggested he apply his knowledge to determine where his lost brother may be found. After a few minutes, Binyamin looked up and told Yosef, "According to this map, my brother is sitting right here". Yosef confirmed his identity to Binyamin, insisting he not tell anyone. This way, when Binyamin is returned, suspected of having stolen the silver goblet, he will know in advance the purpose of everything that was about to unfold. Binyamin had nothing to do with the sale, so there was no reason for him to experience the anxiety his brothers had to endure. What confirms this is that from the time the silver goblet was placed in Binyamin's bag until Yosef reveals himself to his brothers, we don't hear a single word from Binyamin. He never defends himself.

All of this comes to a head at the beginning of Parashat Vayigash. Once Yosef is convinced that Yehuda, the architect of Yosef's sale decades earlier, is willing to replace Binyamin and remain in Egypt as Yosef's slave, the Teshuva of his brothers was complete and that his place in the family was secure. Yosef finally became aware of the fact that his father was told that he was dead, which explains why Yaakov never came to rescue him. Throughout this entire ordeal, we can presume that not one Egyptian ever realized what was happening. Yosef's role as Pharaoh's trusted Prime Minister was never compromised, nor was Yosef's image as the Tzadik he was reputed to be.

What lesson can we take away from these events? Sometimes, saying, "I'm sorry" is not enough! It's interesting to note that when the brothers first tell their father Yaakov that Yosef was killed by a wild animal, his grief is inconsolable. When Serach the daughter of Asher sings her song to Yaakov revealing that Yosef is alive and ruling over all of Egypt, Yaakov's immediate reaction is summed up in two words: "Vayofog leebo". HaRav Yochanan Zweig (Rosh Yeshiva, Miami Beach) says that these words indicate that Yaakov had a heart attack. How do we understand that upon hearing that Yosef was killed, Yaakov grieves, while when he hears that his son is alive, he has a heart attack? One would expect Yaakov to have the heart attack upon hearing the bad news, not the good news that Yosef is alive and the C.E.O. of Egypt. Rav Zweig answers that when Yaakov heard Serach's words, he had to reconcile one of two very difficult realities: His sons were either "shokronim", outright liars or "badoim", delusional. Dealing with this, realizing that this was who his sons may be was enough to give Yaakov Avinu a heart attack! For Yaakov, this was not interpreted as a momentary lapse in judgment resulting in a mistake. This was a major character issue, possibly reflecting an ongoing flaw in the essence of who his sons were.

The sale of Yosef is not an event that simply disappears after the brothers reconcile with him. It's something that remains with Klal Yisroel for centuries, reflected upon in their greatest moments of joy. In Parashat Naso, (Bamidbar 7:22), every tribe makes the same contribution as part of the ceremony dedicating the Mishkan. Each tribe brought a male goat for a sin offering. Why is a sin offering part of this joyous event? Rashi, quoting the Midrash, explains that it was to atone for the sale of Yosef. The brothers dipped his coat into the blood of a male goat they had slaughtered to lead their father down this false path. With all the proper apologies in place, with all the necessary sentiments expressed, Parashat Vayechi clearly demonstrates that there remained a tension amongst the brothers that all of them took to the grave. Once Yosef and everyone who accompanied him to Chevron to bury Yaakov returned, they were fearful that Yosef would seek revenge for everything that occurred. The brothers had Dan and Naftoli, (the sons of Bilha with whom Yosef was close), approach Yosef on their behalf and tell him that Yaakov commanded before his passing that Yosef forgive his brothers. Chazal explain that lying in this manner is permitted for the sake of Shalom Bayit. Nonetheless, if one needs to lie to establish peace, said peace is situated on unstable ground. The Korbon brought as a part of the dedication of the Mishkan centuries later may indicate that this entire event was never fully reconciled. If the brothers took this to their grave, then that dark cloud which began with the sale and the lie to their Father and concluded with a lie expressed on behalf of their father continued to rest over their descendants. This culminates with what we read every Yom Kippur and on the ninth of Av regarding our ten Martyrs, who you recall (as per Rabbeinu B'Chaya), were gilgulim of the brothers. We're paying for the same sin thousands of years later.

Did the brothers pass away hating each other? Obviously not! Was what they did to Yosef impossible to fully repair? Obviously yes! As expressed on many occasions, our people have suffered from the malady called 'sinat cheenom' – only Hashem Yisborach knows for how long we have suffered from this. We speak of Tikkun Olom, being an Ohr L'Goyim, being the needle within the moral compass of the world. If these goals do not begin within the **peaceful** confines of our family, the "organism" we are destined to be, the process of achieving those goals is crippled. Chanukah is over. What are we going to do with the light that burned for eight nights and remains with us? Energize that flame with the Ahavat Cheenom that will bring the Geulah we all await. Indeed, may we enjoy it TOGETHER.