

PARSHAT MIKETZ

Does Yosef have a plan?

He was certainly planning [a way out of jail] when he interpreted the dream of the "sar ha'Mashkim" (see 40:13-15).

He was definitely planning [his own 'political appointment'] when he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams (see 41:33-36!).

Clearly, Yosef was not only a dreamer; he was also a 'master planner'. But what was his plan when he: accused his brothers of being spies, returned their money, and hid his cup in Binyamin's bag, etc.? Was he simply 'teasing' his brothers - in revenge; or did he have a more altruistic motive?

As the Torah never reveals that motive, answering this question requires a lot of detective work.

In the following shiur, we attempt to piece this puzzle together by weaving together some of the theories presented by earlier commentators (& then by adding a little touch of our own).

INTRODUCTION

Before we begin our study, a point of methodology in regard to what allows us to search for an underlying motive behind Yosef's behavior.

As Chumash is a book of "nevuah" [prophecy], and not simply an historical chronicle, we assume that its stories carry a prophetic message. Certainly, commentators can argue in regard to the precise message that should be derived from each story, and how to arrive [and who can arrive] at any conclusion. Nonetheless, all concur that Chumash should be studied in search for its prophetic lesson(s).

This does not imply that we must assume that every action taken by our forefathers was altruistic. However, it does imply that if the Torah records a certain set of events, that they were written for the purpose that we study its detail in search of a significant message for future generations.

With this in mind, we begin our study of the famous story of Yosef and his brothers.

WHY YOSEF DOESN'T WRITE HOME

Considering Yosef's very close relationship with his father [recall how the Torah described him as Yaakov's "ben zkunim" - see 37:3], one would have expected that he make every possible attempt to contact his father. Yet, even after his appointment as head servant of the House of Potiphar, and later as the Commissioner of Egypt, (second only to Pharaoh /see 41:44), Yosef makes no effort to inform his father that he is alive and well.

Does Yosef no longer care for his father who loved him so dearly and now grieves for his lost son? Has he wiped his past from his memory?

To answer this question, Ramban (see his commentary to 42:9) suggests that Yosef's actions were motivated by his aspiration to ensure the fulfillment of his dreams. According to Ramban, Yosef understood that his slavery, and his entire predicament in Egypt, was part of a Divine plan to ensure that his childhood dreams would come true. He also understood (for some reason) that for this to happen, he could not contact his family. And when necessary, he would even 'plan ahead' to help his dreams along.

Ramban's interpretation beautifully explains Yosef's first plan [i.e. accusing his brothers as spies] - as its goal was to force the brothers to bring Binyamin, so that ALL the brothers would bow down to him. This would enable the fulfillment of his first dream - of the sheaves bowing down to him in the field. His second plan [i.e. hiding his cup in Binyamin's bag] was to force them to bring his father as well - to fulfill his second dream - i.e. the sun and moon and stars bowing down - while protecting Binyamin in the

interim (from potential injury by his brothers). In this manner, Ramban explains why Yosef did not write home:

"For had it not been for this (need to fulfill his dreams), Yosef would have committed a terrible sin to cause his father such grief and make him spend so many years in sorrow..."

[See Ramban on 42:9, read carefully.]

According to Ramban, Yosef's need to fulfill his dreams 'allowed' him to treat his father and brothers in such a cruel manner.

FULFILLING 'DREAMS' OR KEEPING 'HALACHA'?

In case you found something 'bothersome' about Ramban's approach, don't feel bad. Later commentators take issue with his conclusion that it would be permissible to cause other people terrible grief, just to make sure a 'dream comes true'.

[See Nechama Leibowitz on Sefer Breishit who quotes various sources in this regard and deals with this issue in depth.]

This question leads Abravanel to suggest a very different approach. He agrees (like Ramban) that Yosef had a 'master plan', however, he disagrees as to its goal.

Abravanel contends that Yosef's goal was to bring his brothers towards repentance for their terrible deeds. Although he planned to ultimately 'reveal' himself; before doing so, he wanted to make sure that they had first performed proper "teshuva".

Abravanel's approach neatly explains just about all of Yosef's actions - which certainly caused his brothers to repent (see 42:21 & 44:16). However, it is not so clear why the goal of 'helping' his brothers to perform "teshuva" would allow Yosef to cause his father continued grief. [We'll return to this question later in our shiur.]

Furthermore, Abravanel's interpretation only explains Yosef's behavior after his brothers arrived to buy food; but it does not explain why Yosef did not contact his father for some twenty years beforehand!

DREAMS REMEMBERED, OR FORGOTTEN?

One could suggest an approach exactly the opposite of Ramban's - i.e. that Yosef had '**forgotten**' his dreams (i.e. since the time that he was sold). It is only after he sees his brothers some twenty years later - as they bow down to him (when they came to buy food) - that he suddenly '**remembers**' his childhood dreams.

To verify this, simply review 42:9 in its context, noting how it seems to imply that it was at this point when Yosef remembered his dreams, and not earlier! [Note Rashi on 42:9 as well!]

In other words, we posit that Yosef's behavior before his brothers arrived stems from the fact that he had 'given up' on his childhood dreams, while his behavior (and 'master plan') after they arrive stems from his renewed understanding of their significance. Let's begin by explaining why Yosef didn't contact home during those twenty years, by considering his predicament in Egypt:

In regard to his brothers, why would Yosef want to contact (or ever see) them again? After all, they had thrown him into a pit and then sold him into slavery (or at least he thought they were behind the sale/ see last week's shiur)!

Furthermore, considering how Egyptian society 'looked down' at the "Ivrim" (see 43:32), contacting his brothers could have endangered his reputable position in Egyptian society.

Nonetheless, even though Yosef had ample reason for not contacting his brothers, it remains difficult to understand why he didn't contact his father (and let's not forget his full brother Binyamin). Could it be that his despise for the rest of his family was greater than his love for his father and brother?

One could suggest that by the time that Yosef had reached a position of power, he was quite sure that his father had already died. Recall that Yaakov was about 110 years old when Yosef was sold, so it would only be logical for him to assume that his father had died (or soon would / note 43:7 & 45:3!).

Hence, the slight chance that his father was still alive was simply not worth the price of returning to deal with his brothers. [

YOSEF 'HAD' A DREAM

A more sophisticated approach to explain why Yosef didn't write home, is presented by Rav Yoel Bin Nun [in an article in Megadim Vol. I /a publication of the Herzog Teachers Institute].

In that article, Rav Yoel posits that Yosef had no idea that his father believed he was dead. Quite the opposite - Yosef assumed that his father would find out that he was sold (i.e. one of the brothers would 'snitch'), and hence he had expected that his father would demand that the brothers trace his whereabouts and come to his rescue! After all, the Yishmaelim [distant "mishpacha"] were international traders who traveled quite often between Eretz Canaan and Egypt. Surely, Yosef hoped, his family would come to his rescue.

Recall as well that Yosef was unaware of how the brothers tricked their father to believe he was dead (with the blood-stained coat). Therefore, Yosef assumes that everyone knows that he is alive, and that he was sold as a slave in Egypt. During his first year or so of slavery, he is 'sure' that in a short time, someone in his family will come to his rescue.

However, many months pass and no one shows. Yosef's hopes are replaced with feelings of rejection. After several months (or years), he may have reached the conclusion that his family doesn't want him to return; but there had to have been a reason.

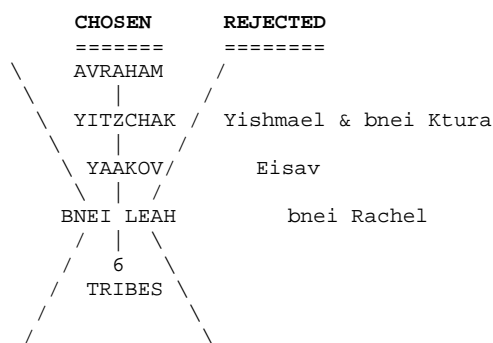
REJECTED FROM THE BECHIRA PROCESS

Rav Yoel posits that Yosef had reached the conclusion that there must have been some divine decree that he was 'rejected' from the family, i.e. from the entire "bechira" process - in manner similar to the rejection of his Uncle Esav or great Uncle Yishmael. It may have appeared to him that only the children of Leah were chosen, while the children of Rachel were rejected, as reflected in Rachel's premature death, and the fact that she was buried on the 'roadside' (while Leah was later to be buried in the Tomb of the Patriarchs).

His childhood dreams are now forgotten, and reluctantly, he accepted his new fate.

Yosef, convinced that his family has abandoned him, accepts this fate and decides to lead his own life. Just as Eisav established himself in Edom, Yosef will make a name for himself in Egypt. He can even bring the name of God into society in his own way, despite not being part of the Chosen Nation.

The following chart reflects what may have been Yosef's perception of the outcome of the "bechira" process (based on this original 'misunderstanding'):



In summary, we posit that Yosef never contacted his family during those twenty years, as he mistakenly assumed that they did not want to contact him, as there had been a divine decision that he was 'rejected' from the 'chosen family'. This tragic misunderstanding can explain why Yosef, even after rising to power, never contacted his father as well.

Now we must consider the second stage, i.e. an explanation for Yosef's behavior after his brothers arrive to buy food.

YOSEF HAS A PLAN

After spending years under this assumption that he has been 'rejected' - everything changes when Yosef sees his brothers among the many who came down to Egypt to buy grain. As they bow down before him, Yosef suddenly 'remembers' his long forgotten dreams (see 42:9), for they now appear to have come true! Should Yosef dismiss this as pure coincidence, or should this partial fulfillment of his childhood dreams lead him to reconsider his earlier conclusions?

It is understandable why Yosef doesn't immediately reveal himself. He needs some time. But, if he simply wanted to hide his identity from them, he could have just ignored them. [Surely, Yosef did not need to entertain every foreigner who came to purchase food.]

But why does Yosef accuse his brothers of being spies? Why does he return their money? Later, when they come back, why does he plant his special cup in Binyamin's bag?

Certainly, we would not expect that Yosef was just 'teasing' his brothers - to 'get back' at them. Rather, it would make more sense to assume that Yosef has a plan - and his actions suggest that he has strategy; but it is not so clear what that master plan is.

In his article, Rav Bin Nun explains Yosef's 'plan' as an attempt to determine what had happened to Binyamin. The fact that Binyamin was not with the brothers the first time they came to Egypt supports his suspicion that Bnei Rachel had been rejected. Therefore, his primary goal is to find out if Binyamin is still alive.

If Binyamin is indeed alive, then Yosef could question him concerning what 'really' happened in the family, and afterward possibly re-unite with his family. On the other hand, if Binyamin never shows (and hence probably not alive), Yosef would remain incognito - preferring never to reunite with his brothers.

[This can explain why Yosef accuses his brothers of being spies. The 'spy accusation' allows Yosef to question them concerning their family roots etc., without raising their suspicion that he may be their brother.]

Although Rav Yoel's explanation flows nicely from the above presentation, it does not explain every detail of Yosef's behavior once Binyamin does arrive. After all, once Binyamin comes, why doesn't Yosef simply take him aside and question him. If Yosef only needs to determine what really happened in the "bechira" process, what point is there in planting his cup in Binyamin's bag?

Surely, one cannot remain oblivious to Yosef's obvious attempt to create a situation that prompts the brothers to repent (as Abravanel explains so beautifully).

On the other hand, one must also explain why Yosef returns their money, and why he seats them in order of their birth, etc. These acts seem to be more of a 'tease' than an impetus for them to do "teshuva" (repentance). What is Yosef's intention in all of this?

Furthermore, if his goal, as Abravanel explains, is only to cause his brothers to repent, then his 'second' plan seems unnecessary - after all, they had already shown remorse for their sin at the first encounter. Recall their initial remorse, that Yosef himself overheard, when they stated:

"Alas we are GUILTY, for we heard his crying out [when he was thrown in the pit], but we did not listen ... therefore this fate has befallen us..." (See 42:21-23)

And if that was not enough, then Yehuda's plea and admission of guilt (see 44:16) certainly would have sufficed.

Finally, even if Abravanel's contention is correct, who gives Yosef the right to 'test' his brothers to see if they have repented? Is Yosef allowed to play God? Is he permitted to tease, trick, and confuse others - in order to awaken their soul? And even if so, does this justify causing his father further aggravation?

PLAYING 'GOD' OR PLAYING 'LEADER'

One could suggest the following explanation for Yosef's behavior (once the brothers arrived) - which is quite similar to Abravanel's approach, but from a very different angle. Let's explain:

Even though Yosef may have forgotten his dreams for some twenty years, when his brothers arrive in Egypt and bow down to

him - everything changes! Totally shocked by what happened, it suddenly dawns upon him that his childhood dreams may actually be coming true after all. Maybe he wasn't rejected? Maybe, his conclusions regarding his family were all wrong?

On the other hand, Binyamin is not with them. But, if Binyamin is still alive and part of the family (as his brothers now claim), then maybe the children of Rachel are indeed included in the "bechira" process!

But now that Yosef had become an 'expert' at dream interpretation, he not only 'remember his dreams', but he now begins to understand their purpose! These dreams were not merely 'predictions' of future events - but rather could serve as guide - to inspire appropriate behavior!

Because of his dreams, Yosef now understands that his 'brothers bowing down' indicates not only that he is **included** in the "bechira" process - but more important - that he is destined to assume family leadership.

[See the TSC shiur on Parshat Toldot, where we explained that once the 'bechira' process reached its critical stage, i.e. that all the children of one of the Avot would be chosen - at this point, one of the brothers needs to be chosen to assume the responsibility of family leadership.]

It is here where our approach will differ from the other approaches that we have discussed thus far.

We posit that when Yosef sees his brothers bowing down, he not only remembers his dreams, he immediately understands their deeper meaning - that they foresee his destiny to become the family leader, and that all twelve brothers will be included in the chosen family.

It is Yosef's realization of this destiny that guides his ensuing behavior - and triggers his 'master plan'.

Before we explain how, let's begin by first explaining what Yosef **cannot** do!

Imagine what would have happened had Yosef revealed his identity immediately, as soon as he recognized his brothers! They would have 'melted' on the spot. How could they have faced him, talk to him? The shame of their relationship would have created an eternal barrier. They would never be able to speak to him, let alone work together as a family.

As family 'leader' - Yosef now recognizes his responsibility to keep the 'chosen' family united and cohesive. Yosef's plan is simple -he must plan a strategy that would reunite the family - to bond them in a manner that could continue to achieve together.

Yosef does not need to play GOD, to ensure that his brothers repent - that would be their own responsibility. Yosef, however, does have a new responsibility to play LEADER.

Hence, Yosef conceives a plan that will rehabilitate the family unity - he needs to enable his brothers with a way by which they can 'redeem themselves'! But, to accomplish this, he must put them through a difficult test:

After procuring the minimal information that he needs by his 'spies' accusation (see 42:7-10 AND 43:7!), he decides to create a situation where the brothers must choose if they are willing to forfeit their own freedom - in order to save Binyamin. Should they 'pass this test', it will be much easier for them to work with Yosef in the future.

Indeed, this plan may cause his father a few extra weeks of suffering. But Yosef must restrain his emotions, for he hopes that it will unfold quickly.

[Yosef probably expected that the brothers would bring Binyamin down immediately. He did not expect that Yaakov would be so reluctant to send Binyamin away.]

Therefore, Yosef's keeps Shimon in jail, to ensure that his brothers will bring Binyamin. Once Binyamin will come, Yosef plans the big 'set up' - where he will plant his cup in Binyamin's bag, thus giving a chance for his brothers to 'prove themselves' (as they so well do).

While doing so, Yosef does many other things to make the brothers wonder and think - to shake them up a bit [what we call "cheshbon ha'nefesh".] He also returns their money, and shows

kindness to them, for he truly does care about their own welfare! But by planting his cup in Binyamin's bag, Yosef provides his brothers with a special opportunity so they can prove to themselves that they have done "teshuva"! Only after they demonstrate their willingness to give up their own lives for Binyamin, will they be able to face themselves, and Yosef - and unite as a cohesive family - to take on the challenges that lay in the future.

Once Yehuda, on behalf of his brothers, admits their guilt and makes his noble offer to become his servant (instead of Binyamin/ see 44:16 & 44:33-34), that might have been enough - but Yosef may have wanted to 'push' his brothers even a bit farther. But when he hears Yehuda's petition concerning the fate of his father (at the beginning of Parshat Vayigash), Yosef can not hold back any more - he 'breaks down' and reveals himself.

To support our thesis, note how Yosef (after revealing his identity and his instinctive opening question regarding the health of his father) immediately emphasizes his assurance that he is not angry with his brothers, and implores them to recognize the Hand of God behind these events.

By doing so, Yosef also alludes to his brothers that they too should look to the future, instead of dwelling on the past (see 45:1-8).

MAASE AVOT SIMAN LA'BANIM

By the end of this entire episode, God had created a situation that would guarantee the physical survival of Am Yisrael during the famine, while setting the stage for their future redemption. Yosef, in the meantime, had created a situation that would keep Am Yisrael united during this formative stage in land of Egypt

Throughout the generations, God oversees our history, while creating opportunities for our redemption. However, as we enjoy His providence, it remains OUR OWN responsibility to make sure that we remain united as our destiny unfolds. Although quite difficult, it remains an eternal challenge for Jewish leadership.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

"SINAT ACHIM" & IDEALISM - a 'mini- shiur'

Can there be any excuse for the brothers conspiring to kill Yosef? How are we to understand the behavior of our ancestors? Is their goal simply to teach us of our 'shameful' heritage, or do they carry a message for future generations?

In the following mini-shiur, we attempt to tackle this difficult question by projecting the "bechira process" - the theme that we have been following in Sefer Breishit - onto the story of Yosef and his brothers.

INTRODUCTION

At first glance, the brothers' hatred of Yosef appears to stem from a petty sibling rivalry. However, when we consider the Torah's story of Yosef's dreams (see 37:2-12), it is possible to arrive at a deeper understanding of their actions. Therefore, we begin our shiur with a quick review of these two dreams:

- (1) "And behold we were gathering sheaves in the field, and my sheaf stood up and remained upright. Your sheaves then gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf" (37:7);
- (2) "... and behold - the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." (37:9)

One doesn't have to be a prophet to interpret these two dreams. Clearly, they point to Yosef's developing sense of superiority over the entire family. However, these dreams also echo an earlier sibling rivalry in Chumash - that between Yaakov and Eisav! Note the similarity between these dreams and Yitzchak's blessing to Yaakov (i.e. the blessing that he intended to give it to Eisav):

"May God bless you with... an abundance of grain...

Be MASTER OVER your brothers, and let your mother's sons BOW DOWN to you." (27:28)

Recall our explanation that this blessing reflected Yitzchak's original understanding that both of his sons were chosen, and hence it became the father's responsibility to appoint a family 'leader'. However, as that story progressed, it became clear to Yitzchak that only Yaakov was chosen. Then, as we advance to the next generation, it appears that ALL of Yaakov's children will be chosen (and not only one). Therefore, it will become necessary for Yaakov to appoint a 'family leader' from among his twelve sons - but it is not yet clear who this 'leader' will be.

With this in mind, it would appear that Yosef's dreams reflect his aspiration to attain this leadership position. [One could also suggest that they may reflect Yosef's understanding that he would be the ONLY 'chosen son,' just as Yaakov himself emerged as Yitzchak's only chosen son!]

This perception is supported not only by Yosef's dreams, but also by several other factors, such as:

- * Yaakov's love and special treatment of Yosef (see 37:3);
- * his "ktonet pasim" (special cloak), a sign of royalty;
- * Yosef is the first son of Rachel, Yaakov's 'primary' wife;
- * Yaakov's silence regarding Yosef's dreams (see 37:11);

ALL IN THE NAME OF GOD

In the brothers' eyes, it becomes rather clear that Yaakov plans to name Yosef (or possibly Yosef and Binyamin, the son's of Rachel) as his exclusive heir(s). Yosef's dreams simply added 'fuel to the flame!'

This background allows us to suggest an ideological basis for the brothers' decision to kill Yosef, as follows:

Had Yosef acted in a more righteous manner, his brothers may have conceded to his destiny as either the 'leader' or the 'chosen' son. However, their perception of Yosef's character troubled them. In their eyes (as the Parshat Vayeshev testifies), Yosef was a slanderer: "And Yosef brought bad reports ('diba ra'ah') of his brothers to his father." (see 37:2)

The brothers, aware of the challenges facing God's special Nation, recognized the need for exemplary leadership. Could Yosef possibly assume this role? To the brothers, the mere thought of 'Yosef the Slanderer' becoming the leader was horrific. From their perspective, it was simply unthinkable that Yosef could assume the leadership of a nation destined by God to be characterized by "tzedeq u'mishpat" (see 18:19). For the sake of "klal Yisrael," they conclude: Yosef must be weeded out!

Hence, the brothers faced a predicament similar to that of Rivka in the previous generation. Just as Rivka had realized that Yitzchak was mistaken in his favoring of Eisav, so too the brothers conclude that Yaakov is mistaken by favoring Yosef.

However, just as Rivka resorted to 'trickery' to ensure that the proper son would be blessed, so too the brothers decide to use 'trickery' to ensure that Yosef would not be appointed their leader. Considering that the entire fate of "Am Yisrael" was at stake, the brothers allow themselves to 'bend the rules' a bit, so as to secure the nation's future.

An ideal opportunity (for the brothers) arises when Yosef arrives at Dotan to visit them. In order to dispose of this menace, they plot first to kill him. Later they opt to sell him - off to a distant land. In either case, their stated goal is to make sure that Yosef is removed from the Divine family (see 37:20 - "v'nireh mah yihyu chalomotav"). Out of respect and concern for their father, lest he fret and worry about his 'missing' son for the rest of his life, they will dip Yosef's coat in blood so that Yaakov will think that he was truly dead. Hopefully, their father will finally realize that Yosef was "nidcheh" (rejected), and now Am Yisrael can continue to develop in the proper fashion.

Thus, based on the theme of Sefer Breishit, the brothers' plot to dispose of Yosef, though inexcusable, is understandable. It is not simply out of petty jealousy that they want to kill Yosef, but rather out of a 'sincere' concern for the future of Am Yisrael.

MAASE AVOT SIMAN LA'BANIM

If our above assumptions are correct, then the story of Yosef and his brothers leaves us with a poignant message. When making important decisions that may affect the future of our communities we must make sure that lofty spiritual goals do not blind us from the most basic principles of moral behavior..

[Based on this discussion, one could suggest that the "piyut" that we recite on Yom Kippur about the Ten Martyrs (who were killed by the Romans during the time of the destruction of the Second Temple and the Bar Kochba revolt) reflects a similar message. In that piyut, Chazal connect those tragedies to the brothers' selling of Yosef. Even though that event had taken place over a thousand years earlier, Chazal consider the behavior of Am Yisrael during that time period similar to that of Yosef and his brothers.

To understand why, recall that Chazal cite "sinat chinam" [petty hatred of one another] as the primary sin of that generation (even though Torah study was at an all time high - see Mesechet Gittin 55b with regard to the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. See also Yoma 9b). Hence, that piyut is making a similar statement, but in a more 'poetic' manner. The generation of "churban bayit sheni" had repeated the sin of "sinat achim" in a manner similar to Yosef's brothers. Hence they deserved to be punished, as the later generation continues in the same pattern of sin.]