Yosef’s Lack of Faith

Rabbi Eli Baruch Shulman

The first words of this week’s parsha tell us that two years elapsed between the events at the end of last week’s parsha, when Yosef interpreted the dreams of the רועי הכבשים and רועי האופים, the wine-steward and the baker, and the events of this week’s parsha, when Pharaoh’s dream and its aftermath catapulted Yosef to supreme power in Egypt.

And the question arises, if the Divine plan was to elevate Yosef, then why wait two years; why keep Yosef languishing in prison for so long? Why couldn’t Pharaoh have had his dream two years earlier?

This question is addressed by Rashi, at the end of last week’s sedrah. And Rashi answers that Yosef was wrong in importuning the רועי הכבשים to remember him to Pharoah; for having thus showed a lack of בטחון, a lack of trust in the רשב”ע. And as punishment for this lack of בטחון, he was made to remain two years in jail.

And Rashi, in this context, quotes a pasuk; fortunate the man who does not turn to braggarts; and Yosef, implies Rashi, would have been more fortunate - or, at least, his fortune would have come sooner - had he not placed his trust in the swaggering bluster of the ungrateful רועי הכבשים.

Now there’s a difficulty here. After all, we know that, along with trust in ה”בקה, there must also be human effort. After all, אין סומכין על הנס we are not supposed to rely on miracles; we expect that ה”בקה’s aid and sustenance, when it comes, will come clothed in the garb of natural events, and nature requires the application of effort. And there is, therefore, in the ordinary course of events, no conflict between בטחון and הנדילנות.

The paths of בטחון and of הנדילנות part company, when events are not ordinary; when the situation seems extraordinarily hopeless, beyond rational, natural remedy. In such a situation - when reasonable הנדילנות can go no further - the man of faith says that he has carried הנדילנות as far as he is able and obligated, and at that point he turns to the ה”בקה and puts himself in His hands; but a man without faith - who has nothing on which to rely except for his own efforts, must resort to acts of desperation; pining his last hope on a last, desperate cast of the die.

But it was for this reason that Chazal found fault with Yosef’s Lack of Faith.
Yosef. Because the pasuk as Rashi says, are described by the boastful braggarts; and it could not, therefore, be expected that a braggart like the boastful braggart, once restored to his high position, would remember the lowly slave whom he had met in jail. And therefore Yosef’s plea to him smacked of desperation. And desperation does not accord with בטחון.

This insight of the Chazon Ish has deep relevence for us today. The situation that confronts our people in Israel is, as you well know, fraught with peril. I don’t pretend to have a prescription for the government of Israel; thank G-d, they’re not asking me anyway.

But I do believe that the Chazon Ish is offering us at least a guideline; a yardstick by which to measure what approaches are appropriate for a people of faith.

The Significance of Dreams
Rabbi Meir Goldwicht

Our parasha, Parashat Mikeitz, opens with Pharaoh’s dreams and ends with Yosef’s rise to power. The previous parasha, Parashat VaYeishev also opens with dreams—those of Yosef—and ends with Yosef’s “descent” into the pit—prison. Both parshiot open with dreams; however, one ends tragically, while the other ends positively.

The lesson is clear: When a person dreams about himself, placing himself in the center of the Universe, he will end up lonely and empty-handed. However, if a person tries to realize the dreams of others, as Yosef does with Pharaoh’s dreams, he will rise to great heights.

Life is full of dreams. The key is to always help others fulfill their dreams to the greatest extent possible. Not only does one lose nothing by helping others, but, quite the contrary, one merits the fulfillment of his or her own dreams.

Once Yosef realized the mistake of his original dreams, in which he placed himself at the center while the members of his family prostrated themselves before him, he knew that the remedy was not only to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams for him, but to advise him towards the fulfillment of those dreams. It was this advice that sparked his rise to power as second-in-command to Pharaoh.

The Ramban and other Rishonim ask how Yosef was so brazen as to advise Pharaoh without being asked for it. Yosef’s “chutzpah” is especially striking considering that he was standing in the presence of all of the chartumim and wise men of Mitzrayim.

And the guideline is this. There is no contradiction between בטחון and rational הстольת. Rational means assessing our situation rationally, and behaving accordingly. We are not to rely on miracles; we have to make rational strategic decisions; and if reason dictates that we reach some accommodation with the Arabs, then we cannot thumb our nose at reason, and expect ה”קב” to make it good.

But, on the other hand, if no reasonable accommodation is available, if rational תולדתשה does not lead to a way out of our difficulties, they we should not resort to acts of desperation, to reckless casts of the die; rather we should remember that at the end of the day, יש לנו אב זקן, we have an old Father in heaven, Who did not forget about Yosef in his prison cell, and Who has not forgotten us, either.
I have a dream. In his fiery and unforgettable speech, Martin Luther King burnt this passage into the American consciousness, altering history. In these four words he couched his hopes, his efforts and his yearning for a brighter future for himself, his children, his people and his country. His rhetoric, passion and ultimately sacrifice transformed his dream largely into reality.

But his “dream” wasn’t really a dream in the classical sense. The dictionary provides seven definitions for the word “dream.” The first three define a “dream” as “a succession of images, thoughts, or emotions passing through the mind” associated with sleep, and the fourth defines it as, “an involuntary vision occurring to a person when awake.” The common denominator between these definitions is their involuntary nature. You don’t choose your dreams. They come to you.

Then come the fifth and sixth definitions, which categorize a dream as, “a vision voluntarily indulged in while awake; daydream; reverie,” or “an aspiration; goal; aim.” This type of dream has very little in common with the first form. In fact, they’re not really “dreams” at all. They’re goals and aspirations; desires for the future.

Which “dream” did Martin Luther King have? Did his dreams come to him, involuntarily in the night? Were they waking “visions” that appeared to him during those long days in county prisons in the South? Or were they the second kind: not visions that came to him, but visions he brought to himself, to his people, and to his country?

Dreams play a prominent role in the second half of Bereishit. Beginning with Yaakov’s vision of the ladder ascending to the heavens, we find dreams throughout the ensuing biblical narrative, specifically surrounding Yosef. He dreams about the sun, moon and stars, and the bowing stalks of wheat. He interprets the dreams of the baker and butler.

And then he interprets the dreams of the Paroh, leading himself to prominence and power. But his dreams provide not only vision but also motivation. When Yosef identifies his brothers, instead of revealing himself and reconciling with them, we read that (Bereishit 42:9),

And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them: ‘You are spies!’

Rashi explains that in remembering his dreams he realized that, “they had been fulfilled, for they had bowed down to him.” Ramban however disagrees, arriving at precisely the opposite conclusion. Yosef remembered that in his dream, eleven stars bowed to him, and not ten. “And since he did not see Binyamin with them, he conjured this plan so that they would bring Binyamin as well to him to fulfill his original dream.” Somehow, says Ramban, his dreams not only envisaged his future, but also prompted his behavior to bring them to fruition. In his mind, his dreams carried so much weight that they compelled him to conspire against his brothers, imprison them and cause anguish to his father – just to make his dreams “come true.”

All this makes me wonder: which type of dreams did Yosef have? Were they the first type of dreams: prophetic, involuntary visions which appeared whether asleep or awake? Or, when we describe Yosef as a “dreamer”, do we really mean that he was a “visionary”, whose voluntary visions drove him to greatness later on? What I really want to know is: did Joseph control his dreams, or did they control him?

When Yosef recounts his dreams to his brothers, we find no mention of sleep. The Torah simply tells us, “and Yosef dreamt a dream.” (37:5) In addition, his brothers hated him for those dreams. After he tells them about the second dream of the constellations, we read that (35:8),

And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words

Yosef: The Great Dreamer
Rabbi Reuven Spolter

Mikeitz 5774
Download thousands of audio shiurim and articles at www.yutorah.org
While we can readily understand their hatred for “his words” – after all, no one forced him to recount his dreams of domination to his brothers – why did they hate him for his dreams? If dreams are simply involuntary visions that arrive whether awake or asleep, how could the brothers blame Yosef for them? Could it be possible that Yosef’s dreams were not dreams in the classic, subconscious sense, but something more voluntary? Was it possible that he himself conjured his dreams of domination over his brothers?

Par’oh’s dreams clearly come during sleep. After each of his dreams we read, “and Par’oh awoke.” And yet, he finds these dreams so powerful that he cannot simply ignore them. Something inside him prompts him to search not only for an interpretation, but for the “right” one. When he awoke in the morning, “his spirit was troubled.” Rashi explains that it “rang inside him like a bell.” (41:2) He knew that his dreams carried a critical message, yet he could not unravel their message. No matter what interpretations his servants suggested, “there was none that could interpret them for him.” (41:8) Rashi notes that of course people tried. Still, “their voice did not enter his ears and he had no ‘peace of spirit’ from them.” He just knew that their interpretations were off the mark. He knew that the answer to the riddles of his dreams was locked somewhere inside him. He simply needed the right person to find the key.

That person was, of course, Yosef. Who better to unravel the complicated meaning of dreams that the “dreamer” himself. Who more than Yosef could appreciate the mysterious and complicated connection between divine vision and personal aspiration; between strange visions and personal interpretations – and maybe even between hopes and aspirations and the desire and willingness to make the effort to translate them into reality?

On the one hand, Yosef tells Par’oh that his dreams bear the stamp of God: “What God is about to do He hath declared unto Par’oh,” (41:25) and, “it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.” (42:32) But then Yosef proceeds to insert himself into “God’s” plan – in order to make his own “dreams” come true. “Now therefore let Par’oh seek out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt.” (42:33) Let’s see. Who could Yosef possibly be talking about? So did his dream presage his rise to power, or did it cause it? Did he act in accordance with God’s original plan, or did God’s message motivate him to fulfill that Divine desire? It’s a maddening Catch-22. There’s no way to know.

Even more importantly, even if we entertain the possibility that Joseph’s dream came to him during his waking moments, does that make them any less “real”? What is our imagination, our ability to “dream”; to see the impossible, to year an unlikely and improbable future; to see the world not as it is but as we feel it should be – other than the spark of the Divine?

Yosef’s greatness lay in two critical areas: First and foremost, his personal dreams and hopes mirrored those of the Creator. His vision of rule over his brothers derived not from a selfish desire for power and glory, but for the betterment of his father’s family and the fulfillment of God’s plan. He saw his own greatness in the future because he realized his potential – and his destiny, to use him capabilities to change and ultimately save the world. But he also realized that dreams aren’t simply visions which come true. They must be made true. Had he sat back and waited for his dreams to fulfill themselves, they never would have been realized. Yosef realized that dreams demand action; so he told them to his brothers, bore the brunt of their hatred, and set into motion the unlikely chain of events that transformed his dreams into reality.

Today we no longer have the first type of dream. God doesn’t come to us in visions during the night, sending strange messages to world leaders through images of sheep and wheat. (Can you imagine what would happen if Barack Obama called for a dream-interpreter, to help him make a critical policy decision? Impeachment? Insane asylum?) But we do have an abundance of the second type of dream: aspirations and yearning for fundamental change, whether in our personal or communal or national lives. In moments of peace and tranquility – not unlike Yosef, alone in the fields with his sheep for hours on end – we allow our minds to see the world the way it should be; it could be and perhaps it will be. Do we see in them the spark of the Divine? Do our dreams mirror the will of God? Do we envision in our dreams the redemption of the world, the betterment of life, or perhaps bringing the Jewish people closer to our national goal? (Or do our “dreams” have more to do with large LCD television sets and man-caves with surround sound?) And then, have we done anything to follow in Yosef’s footsteps: not just to have the dream, but to make it happen?

Martin Luther King’s greatness lay not just in his ability to dream a future of racial equality. Rather, he also gave the speech, and organized the protests, and sacrificed his life. And ultimately, translated his dream into the social fabric we take for granted today.
As the story of Yosef and his brothers unfolds in Parshas Miketz, we learn about the birth of Yosef’s children, Menashe and Ephraim. Soon after Yosef was catapulted into prominence, named viceroy, and invested as chief financial officer of Egypt, the Torah tells us that his two sons were born. Yosef called the first one Menashe, “ki nashani elokim es kol amali v’es kol beis avi” - because G-d had me forget all of my burden and my father’s entire house. Radak expounds this phrase, explaining that Hashem granted Yosef such wealth and glory that Yosef forgot his burdensome past of having been sold, and he also forgot his father’s entire house. It seems rather peculiar that Yosef would name his first son to commemorate his detachment from his father’s house. Why would Yosef celebrate his forgetting his father’s home with the name Menashe? Perhaps we can resolve this question with an understanding of the essence of Menashe, the nature of redemption, and the number eight.

The Navi Yeshaya describes the age of redemption as the ultimate return of the lost Jews of Ashur and the castaways from the land of Egypt. At the end of days, all of the sparks of holiness, the Jewish souls, that have been lost and cast away to the far-flung corners of the earth will be gathered together to unite in the service of Hashem. According to tradition, this supernatural age of redemption is associated with the number eight. The number seven represents the natural, physical order, while the number eight corresponds to the metaphysical, supernatural aspects of life (eg. the mitzvah of Milah). The spiritual number eight, Shmoneh, and the identity of Menashe represent the ability reconnect with G-d from the farthest reaches of life. Menashe personifies this ability to reach and redeem those lost souls who had been forgotten in faraway lands. Rav Moshe Wolfson, shlita (Emunat Itcha, Vayera 5754) notes that the letters of Menashe and Shmoneh are the same and that the tribe of Menashe was the eighth tribe to offer Korbanos (sacrifices) on the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan. The B’nei Yissaschar teaches that the future inauguration of the Beis Hamikdash will occur in the month of Cheshvan, the eighth Hebrew month. We know that Cheshvan is the least active of all months, with no days of halachic significance. Yet, it is in this bleak month that the supernatural redemption will take place.

By naming his first son Menashe, Yosef was not celebrating an end to his past. On the contrary, Yosef was teaching the most profound lesson of redemption - that despite having forgotten all of his past, he could still relate to the dream of the supernatural, Shmoneh, and envision his redemption. Despite being alienated from his true past and immersed in the life of Egypt, Yosef realized that he could still reconnect to his Jewish identity and was assured of his ultimate redemption. He expressed this connection in the name Menashe, which symbolizes our ability to be redeemed and connected despite feeling far and disconnected. Yosef taught us that being forgotten (Menashe) in the land of Egypt is not a cause for despair, but rather a hint to Shmoneh - the signal for supernatural hope and redemption.

What Frightens a King?
Rabbi Shmuel Goldin

After dreaming of seven lean cows consuming seven healthy cows and of seven thin ears of grain consuming seven robust ears, Pharaoh awakens deeply troubled. He commands “all of the sorcerers of Egypt and all of its wise men” to interpret his visions but receives no satisfactory response.

The butler recalls Yosef’s ability to interpret dreams and mentions him to the king. Pharaoh orders Yosef released from prison and brought to the palace. Pharaoh then repeats the content of his dreams to Yosef.

Questions
Why is Pharaoh so deeply troubled by his dreams?
Does the text offer any hint as to the source of Pharaoh’s fears?

Approaches
A: The narrative before us is strangely repetitive. First the text describes Pharaoh’s dreams in detail as they occur. Then the dreams are described, again in detail, when the king recounts them for Yosef. The Torah could simply have stated, “And Pharaoh told the content of his dreams to Yosef.” Why the redundancy?

The Torah, as noted before (see Bereishit 3 and Chayei Sara 3), never repeats a conversation or an event without reason. In this case, the repetition within the text provides a glimpse into Pharaoh’s mind. When Pharaoh speaks to Yosef, he conveys not only his dreams but his perception of those dreams.

Specifically, two addenda appended by Pharaoh to his first
vision may provide the key to the fears of this mighty king.

1. The king dreams: “And behold out of the river emerged seven cows, of beautiful appearance and healthy flesh…. And behold seven other cows emerged out of the river after them, poor of appearance and gaunt of flesh…”

The king recounts: “And behold out of the river emerged seven cows, of healthy flesh and beautiful form…. And behold seven other cows emerged after them, scrawny, and of very poor form and emaciated flesh. Never have I seen such in all the land of Egypt for badness.”

Pharaoh is clearly disturbed by the possibility that “scrawny, emaciated cows” could even appear in Egypt at all. Like so many monarchs before and after him, Pharaoh prefers to live in a fantasy world of absolute power and success. There is no place in the king’s lush, rich empire for “weak cows.” Pharaoh, therefore, emphatically declares that no such cows have ever before appeared in his land, as he desperately attempts to avoid the ramifications of his vision.

2. The king dreams: “And the seven cows of poor appearance and gaunt flesh consumed the seven cows of beautiful appearance and good health, and Pharaoh awoke.”

The king recounts: “And the emaciated, inferior cows consumed the first seven healthy cows. And they came inside them and it was not apparent that they came inside them – for their appearance was as inferior as before; and I awoke.”

The world in which Pharaoh lives is governed by clear rules. In this world nations conquer other nations with regularity. Through subterfuge and cunning, the seemingly weak can even defeat the seemingly strong. The king can therefore accept the possibility of lean cows eating healthy cows.

What Pharaoh cannot accept, however, is the possibility that the victor in a battle should remain unchanged. In the king’s world, conquest invariably bestows upon the victor increased physical power and strength. This rule is the basis of Pharaoh’s own supremacy. When, in his vision, the lean cows remain visibly unaffected after consuming the healthy cows, Pharaoh’s world is threatened and he awakens abruptly, sorely troubled and distraught.

B: Yosef sets the king’s mind at ease by explaining both the existence of the lean cows and their unchanged status in symbolic terms. Pharaoh’s visions, he asserts, represent natural challenges which can be overcome through proper planning.

Little does Pharaoh know, however, that his fears are actually wellfounded. There is, unbeknownst to Pharaoh and perhaps even to Yosef, a hidden subtext to these visions. Pharaoh is about to be threatened in ways he could scarcely begin to imagine.

The king’s dreams set in motion a series of events which eventually give rise to the birth of a unique nation within his very realm. This eternal Jewish nation will not be bound by the rules governing Pharaoh’s world. Spiritual fortitude will overcome physical strength as this seemingly weak people outlasts the most powerful empires in the history of mankind. Pharaoh’s kingdom will be only the first to fall in the face of the Jews’ march across the face of history.

The victorious Jewish nation, however, will not change overtly for generations. We will measure our success, not in terms of increased physical strength, but in the unbroken maintenance and development of our enduring spiritual heritage.

“Lean cows” will consume “robust cows.” The seemingly weak will overcome the strong, yet remain unchanged.

Pharaoh’s world is about to crumble; he has good reason to be troubled by his dreams.

Yosef’s Goblet
Rabbi Avraham Gordimer

Yosef’s goblet plays quite a prominent role in Parshas Mikeitz. Rashi (on 42:14) quotes Bereshis Rabbah that Yosef disclosed to his brothers (who did not yet know his identity) that he divined with his goblet that they destroyed the city of Shechem. Rashi quotes the Midrash again (43:33) when he narrates that Yosef tapped his goblet as he announced his brothers’ names and lineage as they sat down to eat (giving the impression that the goblet empowered Yosef with a degree of omniscience so as to know this information, which the brothers had not yet disclosed to him). Similarly, Yosef instructed his messenger to make the brothers aware that the goblet was of great value, as it was utilized by Yosef for divining (44:5). Why was Yosef’s goblet so important? Also, why did Yosef seemingly lead his brothers to believe that he was involved in some type of sorcery or fortune-telling?

One may suggest that the answers to these questions may be found the nature of the overall scheme which Yosef set out for his brothers. In order to turn their hearts to teshuva, he placed them in a condition which was akin to that of their youth, at which time they resented Yosef and sold him. Thus, Yosef displayed preferential treatment
towards Binyomin and placed him in apparent peril so as to test his brothers and determine if they would show love to this younger, favored brother and take responsibility for him. So too, Yosef knew that Binyomin’s fate would affect that of Yaakov Avinu. The brothers were thereby faced with a repeated opportunity to relieve their father’s anxiety and concern or to augment his emotional suffering. These trials were designed by Yosef to lead his brothers to the path of teshuva, by enabling them to make amends for identical transgressions of years past.

In the same vein, Yosef perceived that by resenting his dreams and attempting to frustrate their prophetic fulfillment, his brothers were trying to force the hand of divine providence. In order to test his brothers in this area, Yosef attempted to impress upon them that their lives and deeds could be omnisciously known and that their fate could be determined and sealed via the goblet and sorcery associated with it. The brothers were challenged with countering and denying the validity of this seemingly all-knowing and all-controlling force and asserting their belief in God’s exclusive omniscience and omnipotence. Yehudah’s immediate reply to the apparent theft of the goblet, “... God has found the guilt of your servants...,” constituted an affirmation of Hashem’s providence, signaling to the brothers that the experience was a punishment for their past deeds, in conformity with Yosef’s scheme.

God Did Not Let Joseph’s Brothers “Move On”
Rabbi David Horwitz

A student I had quite a number of years ago, who had confided in me that he had experienced much bullying, especially during his high school years, shared a crucial insight with me, one which was the fruit of “wisdom born in pain.” “Bullies,” he remarked, “move on. It’s easy for them. They forget about the incidents in which they were cruel to someone, and don’t give it a second thought. But it is harder for the bullied to move on!”

The idea of “moving on,” of simply not thinking of the pain that one has caused someone else, is not limited, of course, to bullies, but the basic idea remains the same. Classic illustrations of the type in secular literature are the characters of Tom and Daisy Buchanan as depicted in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel The Great Gatsby. Fitzgerald’s unforgettable description of them is as follows:

“They were careless people, Tom and Daisy- they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made.” (F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby [New York, 1925, repr., 1953, pp. 180-81.]

Did Joseph’s brothers’ simply “move on” after what they had done to him in Parashat Va-Yeshev? The answer to this question might be a mahloqet bein ha-mepharshim ha-rishonim. In the beginning of Genesis Chapter 38 (verse 1), the Torah states: About that time Judah left his brothers and camped near a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah. Why did Yehudah leave his brothers? According to Rashi (following Bereshit Rabbah, ch. 85), this separation was not initiated by Yehudah. When the other brothers of Joseph saw Jacob’s intense grief; they deposed Yehudah from his position as the unofficial head of the fraternal clan. “Had you advised us to let him go, we would have listened to you.” According to this opinion, the brothers, immediately after the sale had begun to regret their action, and had definitely not “moved on” in the aforementioned careless way.

On the other hand, R. Abraham ibn Ezra, Ralbag, Shadal and others (essentially for chronological reasons that will not be discussed here) all maintain that the events depicted in Genesis 38 (viz., Yehudah’s marriage to the daughter of Shua, the story of Er and Onan, and the episode with Tamar) reflect events that transpired before the sale of Joseph. In my opinion, an important corollary of this view is that the evidence that is brought to suggest that the brothers at that point in time already had a change of heart automatically disappears. Thus, it may very well be that until the encounter of the brothers with the mysterious ruler of Egypt, the brothers had in fact “moved on,” in spite of Jacob’s obvious pain! They did not even think about their treatment of Joseph, much less regret it!

In Parashat Va-Yeshev, the case of Joseph and his brothers can be viewed, from one perspective, as a classic example of “the bully, the bullied and the bystander.” As the bullied, Joseph had an imperative, no matter how hard, to “move on.” And, thank God, he did so as best as he could. (With all appropriate diffidence, I wonder if Joseph’s self-perception as “the bullied” might be a reason why he did not try to contact Jacob his father during all the years that he was in Egypt, an issue discussed by Ramban and R. Yitzhak Arama, the author of the work ’Aqedat Yitzhak, among others. Perhaps, for reasons of psychological survival, Joseph had to “move
on” and not let the fact that he was bullied so cruelly by his brothers defeat him. But by contacting Jacob, while of yet not knowing if his brothers were still intent upon bullying him to death, he would be returning to the system that had almost resulted in his demise!

But although originally Joseph was “the bullied,” the wheel of fate starts to turn in Parashat Miqetz.

Now Joseph was the vizier of all the land; it was he who dispensed rations to all the people of the land. And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed low to him, with their faces on the ground. When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but acted like a stranger toward them and spoke harshly to them. He asked them, “Where do you come from?” And they said, “From the land of Canaan, to buy food.” For although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. And Joseph recalled the dreams that he had dreamed about them (Genesis 42:7-8).

When Joseph, the second-in-command to Pharaoh, realizes that the ten men in front of him are indeed his brothers, he also realizes that his successful endeavor to “move on” is threatened by the mere appearance of his brothers. He must, consequently, see if they have no longer “moved on,” that is, if they had, in retrospect, thought about their previous actions and had realized that they had acted horribly towards their younger brother. Thus, the elaborate scheme in which Joseph tries to replicate, as best as possible, the events leading up to his own sale. He does this by first getting his brothers to bring Benjamin to Egypt, and then, casts Benjamin as the “Joseph figure” in the restaging of the play. Would the brothers resent that Benjamin’s initial preferential treatment by the mysterious ruler of Egypt? Would they leave him in Egypt, presumably to a short hard life of slavery, followed by an anonymous death, as they had left the scene and after he was sold so many years ago?

The original test that the brothers must pass to prove that they are not spies is to bring Benjamin to Egypt. Robert Alter, “Joseph and his Brothers,” Commentary 70:5, (November, 1980), pp. 59-69, on p. 64, wrote the following analysis: “The test has a profound logical function in the oblique interrogation of the brothers: if in fact they have left Benjamin unharmed all these years, the truth of their words will be confirmed, that, despite past divisiveness, “we are twelve… brothers, the sons of one man.” (Genesis 42:11). I would add that moreover, if there was an indication that brothers were kind to Benjamin, the child who now structurally occupied the same position that Joseph had (viz., a son of Jacob’s beloved wife Rachel, and the son of his old age), there would be evidence that, if they could do it again, they would not repeat their behavior towards Joseph.

At the conclusion of Parashat Miqetz, Joseph ensures that his silver goblet is placed in Benjamin’s sack. He now construes another test: how far would the brothers go to save the other son of Rachel?

Regarding the subsequent confrontation between the ruler of Egypt and the brothers after the goblet is found in Benjamin’s sack, Alter writes: “This is the final confirmation by the brothers themselves of Joseph’s dreamt-of supremacy, their necessary subservience. It is also an open admission of guilt which at least psychologically must refer to the real crime, the selling of Joseph, and not to the imputed crime of stealing the silver goblet. Judah may understandably feel that he and his brothers cannot prove their innocence in regard to the stolen goblet, but he could not seriously believe that it is an act they have knowingly committed, and the crime that God Himself has at last found out is certainly the making away with Joseph.”

Thus, the brothers have indeed no longer “moved on.” They are approaching the moment of self-reckoning where they truly realize how horribly they had acted. It is Judah, who initiated the sale of Joseph, who, speaking on behalf of his brothers who subsequently steps forwards and completely renounces his previous behavior.

When Judah and his brothers re-entered the house of Joseph, who was still there, they threw themselves on the ground before him. Joseph said to them, “What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me practices divination? Judah replied “What can we say to my lord? How can we plead, how can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered the crime of your servants. Here we are, then, slaves of my lord, the rest of us as much as he in whose possession the goblet was found.” But he replied, “Far be it for me to ac thus! Only in he in whose possession the goblet was found shall be my slave; the rest of you may go back unhindered to your father” (Genesis 44: 14-17).

The full denouement of the story will occur when Judah will offer to stay by himself alone in Egypt (re-creating what had actually happened to Joseph), and will plead for Benjamin to return to Canaan with the rest of his brothers. At that point, Judah will have fully renounced the way of the bully, and will have fully empathized with the person that he had participated in bullying. This culmination of the story will be treated at length in Parashat Va-Yigash.