

וְכֹל יוֹסֵף לְהִתְאַפֵּק לְכֹל הַנֹּצְבִים עִלָּיו וַיִּקְרָא הוֹצִיאוּ כָל אִישׁ מֵעָלָי וְלֹא עָמַד אִישׁ אִתּוֹ בְּהִתְנַדֵּעַ יוֹסֵף אֶל אָזְוִיו: וַיִּתֵּן אֶת כָּלֹּ בִבְכֵי וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּשְׁמַע בֵּית פַּרְעֹה: וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אָזְוִיו אֲנִי יוֹסֵף הֲעוֹד אַבִּי זֶה וְכֹל יָכֹל אָזְוִיו לַעֲזוֹת אִתּוֹ כִּי נִבְהַלּוּ מִפְּנָיו: וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אָזְוִיו גָּשׁוּ זֶה אֵלַי וַיֵּשְׁבוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יוֹסֵף אֲזַיְכֶם אֲשֶׁר מִכִּרְתֶּם אֶתִּי מִצְרַיִמָּה: וְעַתָּה אֵל תִּעַזְבוּ וְאֵל יִזַּר בְּעֵינֵיכֶם כִּי מִכִּרְתֶּם אֶתִּי הֲנֵה כִּי לְמוֹזְזָה שְׁלַחְנִי אֱלֹהִים לְפָנֵיכֶם: כִּי זֶה שְׁנַתִּים הָרַעַב בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ וְעוֹד זֹכֵם שְׁנַיִם אֲשֶׁר אֵין זֹרִישׁ וְקָצִיר: וַיִּשְׁלַחְנִי אֱלֹהִים לְפָנֵיכֶם לְשׂוֹם לָכֶם שְׂאֲרֵית בְּאֶרֶץ וּלְהַחְיִית לָכֶם לְפָלִיטָה גְּדוֹלָה: וְעַתָּה לֹא אֶתֶם שְׁלַחְזֶתֶם אֶתִּי הֲנֵה כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּשְׁיַמְנִי לָאֵב לְפַרְעֹה וּלְאֶדוֹן לְכֹל בֵּיתוֹ וּבֹשֶׁל בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

(בראשית מה:א-ח)

Joseph was unable to tolerate the presence of all those standing around him, and he called out, "Remove every man from me." and no man was present when Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. He raised his voice crying and Egypt heard and the house of Pharaoh heard. Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph – is my father still alive?" and his brothers were unable to answer him, because they were terrified of him. Joseph said to his brothers, "Please approach me." and they approached. And he said, "I am Joseph your brother that you sold to Egypt. But, now, do not be sad, and do not be frightened because you sold me here, because God sent me before you to provide. There have already been two years of famine in the land, and there will be another five years without plowing and harvest. God sent me before you to make for you a remnant in the land, and to sustain you for a great deliverance. Now, you did not send me here, God did, and He made me a colleague to Pharaoh, a master in his entire house, and a ruler in the whole land of Egypt."

(Gen. 45:1-8)

We know that the brothers were extremely sincere, righteous individuals, but it is often hard to appreciate their righteousness, especially, when the Torah seems to focus on their failings. Yet, here we have an extreme example of the pure outlook of Joseph that prevents him from even a tinge of anger or resentment towards his brothers for selling him as a slave to Egypt.

Let me explain.

Joseph appears to contradict himself in the above *par'shah*. Upon revealing his true identity, he immediately asks them if his father is still alive.

There are three issues with this "question". First of all, why doesn't the verse state that he *asked* them. The Torah states, "Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph – is my father still alive?'" One would expect the Torah to state: Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph." And he asked them, "Is father still alive?" The fact that the Torah does not introduce his question by stating that he *asked*, implies that this was part of his statement, and not really a question at all.

Secondly, why is Jacob referred to as *his* father? Why did Joseph not say *our father*, or simply *father*?

But, there is a stronger question on Joseph. *Par'shah Vayigash* picks up in the middle of the story, but we must not forget what just occurred. The brothers had returned to Egypt from Canaan, this time with Benjamin. Joseph asks them, upon their arrival if Jacob is yet alive (Gen. 43:27). They respond in the affirmative (ibid. v. 28). Joseph proceeds to entrap them by having his goblet placed in the bag of Benjamin. They had scarcely exited the city limits (Gen. 44:4) when they are caught stealing, and forced to return to Egypt, before Joseph, where this *par'shah* begins. Now, as far as I am aware, the telegraph had yet to be invented – so why is Joseph asking about the welfare of his father? He had just asked them!

Based on these observations, the Talmud comments (Bavli Chagiga 4b) that Rebbi Elazer would cry upon reading the verse, “And his brothers were unable to answer him, because they were terrified of him.” He would say, “If this (reaction) is true of human reproach, how much more so when it comes to Divine reproach.”

Chazal understood Joseph to be reproaching them, and not truly asking a question. It was a statement, not a question at all. For this reason, the verse does not say that he *said* I am Joseph, and *asked* them is my father still alive. It merely states that he *said* is my father still alive. This also explains why Joseph refers to Jacob as *his* father. He was saying, in effect, how could Jacob still be alive after everything you did. You failed to treat him as a father.

However, Joseph proceeds to immediately contradict his attitude towards them. As we explained, he is clearly blaming them for their actions. Yet, he proceeds to whitewash them, stating that everything was Divinely orchestrated. He even goes so far as to say, “Now, you did not send me here, God did.” Does Joseph blame them or not?

The answer to this question is rooted in the proper Jewish attitude to life's challenges.

The *Sefer Hachinuch* (*mitzvah* 241) explains the prohibition to take revenge and bear a grudge in the following manner:

משרשי המצוה, שידע האדם ויתן אל לבו כי כל אשר יקרהו מטוב עד רע, הוא סיבה שתבוא עליו מאת השם ברוך הוא, ומיד האדם מיד איש אחיו לא יהיה דבר בלתי רצון השם ברוך הוא, על כן כשיצעהו או יכאיבהו אדם ידע בנפשו כי עוונותיו גרמו והשם יתברך גזר עליו בכך, ולא ישית מחשבותיו לנקום ממנו כי הוא אינו סיבת רעתו, כי העוון הוא המסבב, וכמו שאמר דוד עליו השלום [שמואל ב' ט"ז, י"א] הניחו לו ויקלל לו כי אמר לו השם יתברך, תלה הענין בחטאו ולא בשמעי בן גרא...

Among the roots of this mitzvah is for a person to know and make into an emotional reality, that whatever befalls him, good or bad, the [ultimate] cause is God. Nothing can emerge from any human being that is not the desire of God. Therefore, when one is pained or troubled by another person, he should know in his soul that his sins have caused this to befall him, and God has decreed upon him thus. He should not focus his thoughts on taking revenge from this individual, because he is not the cause of the evil which has befallen him, but rather the sin. Just like King David said (when he was being cursed by

Shimi Ben Geira, “Let him be and allow him to curse, because God has told him to.”
*King David placed the blame on his sins and not on Shimi Ben Geira*¹...

Life poses us with a duality of free will versus Divine control. On the one hand, everyone has free will, while on the other hand, whatever befalls us is Divinely decreed. How can we reconcile this seeming contradiction?

As an active human, utilizing our free will, we are responsible for our choices and will be judged by God based on them. However, the actual achievement of our intentions is not left up to us. There are far too many factors in life to guarantee that any idea that we may have will see its fruition. What actually occurs is purely in the hands of God.

Rav Mayer Twersky once provided me with the following example. Let us say that I want to punch you in the face (now, Rav Twersky is well over six feet tall, with a phat, black beard, and, frankly, quite intimidating. You can imagine my terror at this example...), if you deserve it then I will connect. If you do not deserve it, any number of things can happen; you could duck, I could miss, etc.

While we are fully responsible for our decisions, their achievement is out of our hands². For this reason, revenge, or perhaps more precisely, bearing a grudge against another human being, is completely misplaced. It can be compared to a man who hits a dog with a stick, whereupon the dog begins to bark and bite at the stick. An individual's decisions are between him and his creator. It is not our place to be executioners for God. We do not judge. Our reaction to life's difficulties should *NOT* be to turn our sights outwards at the *intermediate* cause of our misfortune, but rather to turn our sights inwards at our own failings. This is truly addressing the cause of our trouble, not merely the symptom³.

Joseph is addressing both issues in the dialogue with his brothers. First he reproaches them, so that they are aware of their responsibility to do *teshuvah*. However, he immediately states that their responsibility to do *teshuvah* is between them and God; it has *NOTHING TO DO WITH HIM*. “But, now, do not be sad, and do not be frightened because you sold me here, because God sent me before you to provide.” Whatever occurs is allowed by God, because it furthers His purpose. Joseph is saying that God utilized their choice to sell him as a slave to Egypt, to further His purposes, the immediate one being to provide sustenance for the whole family during the famine (we, of course, know that there was another purpose as well, which was ultimately to allow the Jews to be enslaved in a foreign country, as God had

1. It is fascinating to note that Mordechai, the hero of the Purim story, was a later descendant of Shimi Ben Geira. As a result of allowing Shimi to live, David “produced” Mordechai.

2. This is true even when it comes to *mitzvos*! We can try, but there is no guarantee we will be successful. The *Mesilas Yeshorim* mentions this as a reason for *zerizus*, alacrity, in our *mitzvah* performance – for who knows if we will merit to complete the *mitzvah*!

3. This could easily be compared to any physical illness. The truth is, (assuming we performed the proper *hishtadlus*) one gets ill, due to some necessity for suffering. The cause of the illness is not the virus, it is merely the stick in the hands of God. We think we address causes with our antibiotics and medication, but this is usually not the case. See Ramban to Lev. 26:11.

4. My father-in-law noted that the name of God used here by Joseph is, appropriately, *Elokin*, the name connoting Divine justice.

decreed to Abraham – see Gen. 15:13).

Due to this authentic, Torah attitude, Joseph was able to relate to his brothers without a tinge of anger or resentment. He was able to live a life that was focused on growth and improvement; one that constantly enhanced his connection with his creator. How challenging it is to internalize such an attitude, and yet, Joseph accomplished it. Here, the Torah provides us with a window into the incredible level that our ancestors achieved, and an example for us to strive for.

Maybe the next time we feel like screaming at the rude operator we called for “customer service” we can keep this in mind! Somewhere I heard the line, anger is self affliction for someone else’s stupidity. When we have troubles, we should turn the camera inwards and take responsibility, not outwards to find someone else to blame. If we can pull this off, we will grow in leaps and bounds.

5. See also the interaction between Joseph and his brothers after Jacob is buried (Gen. 50:15-20). The brothers fabricate an instruction from Jacob to Joseph out of concern that once his father is gone, Joseph will now allow his vengeance expression. His response to them is, “Am I God?” This could be interpreted in two ways: (1) I do not judge people, that is the responsibility of God. (2) As Rashi writes, I am not God, I could not harm you even if I wanted to. You see from your own actions that you tried to do evil to me, but God made it all good – here I am today enabled to support us!