

# SUPPLY SIDE DIPLOMATICS

*by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky*

After Yaakov's passing the brothers were worried. After all, Yoseph was the ruler of Egypt and their father Yaakov was now gone. And so the Torah tells us at the end of this week's portion, "Yoseph's brothers perceived that their father was dead, and they said, 'Perhaps Joseph will nurse hatred against us and then he will surely repay us all the evil that we did him.' So they instructed that Joseph be told, 'Your father gave orders before his death, saying: 'Thus shall you say to Joseph - 'O please, kindly forgive the spiteful deed of your brothers and their sin for they have done you evil; so now, please forgive the spiteful deed of the servants of your father's G-d.'"

The Torah continues by telling us that "Yoseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers themselves also went and flung themselves before him and said, "We are ready to be your slaves. But Joseph said to them, "Fear not, for am I instead of G-d? Although you intended me harm, G-d intended it for good - in order to accomplish -- it is as clear as this day -- which a vast people be kept alive. So now, fear not -- I will sustain you and your young ones.' Thus he comforted them and spoke to their heart." (See Genesis 50 15-21)

Yoseph seems very benevolent. He committed himself to sustain his brothers, despite their having sold him into a life of slavery. Yet, maybe they truly wanted some form of retribution. After all it is quite hard to bear the burden of guilt for the rest of your life, and if that is the case, perhaps Yoseph's benevolence may have defeated the purpose of their request.

**An old yarn that I heard as I was still unmarried has the wealthy father of the prospective bride interviewing her suitors before they got a chance to meet her.**

Each one of the young men who discussed their anticipated financial plans was rebuffed.

One said that he would be going to medical school another was going to law school, and yet a third was waiting for an inheritance that would come any day. Each eager beau was barraged with a series of questions about the details of his future life and none had the proper answer.

Finally, a young Yeshiva fellow came to see the tycoon's daughter. After talking to the young man for twenty minutes, the man was beaming. He proudly introduced the prospective groom to his daughter with the highest recommendation.

His wife and assistants were all astounded. What had this young man said that the others had not?

The man was still beaming when he repeated the conversation. "When I asked him where he plans

to live when he first gets married he replied, 'G-d will provide!' When I asked him how he plans to feed a family if he is sitting and studying he looked at me and declared, 'G-d will provide!' When I asked when there are children, how does he plan to pay for their education and welfare, he beamed once again and exclaimed, 'G-d will provide!'"

The man's entire household was baffled. "Why do those responses please you so much?"

The man smiled as he puffed out his chest, "He thinks I'm G-d!"

It is said that Yoseph Dov HaLevi Soleveitchik of Brisk once remarked in wit that Yoseph was telling the brothers, "If you are afraid of retribution, I will provide you with the sweetest revenge. I will be your sole source of support and you will have to rely upon me for your sustenance."

The Talmud in Beitzah 32 states, "R. Natan ben Abba also said in the name of Rav: If someone is dependent on someone else's table, the world looks dark to him, for it says, "He wanders about for food-where is it?- he realizes that the day of darkness is ready, at hand" (Job 15:23). The Rabbis taught: One of three whose life is no life, is a person who is dependent on someone else for his meals."

And so, Yoseph was telling his brothers, perhaps I will not employ physical retribution but perhaps your greatest punishment will be that your livelihood will be dependent on the little brother you thought was only worthy of a place in a pit. In the Grace After Meals we beseech the Almighty, "Please don't have us rely upon the gifts of flesh and blood, but rather sustain us from Your hand." To live a life dependent upon others is no blessing. So according to this insight, Yoseph gave them something the brothers may really have asked for - the sweetest and most benevolent punishment they could have desired.

Good Shabbos,

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

*Dedicated in memory of Joseph Miller z"l HY"D by his children Mr and Mrs. Geoffrey Miller*

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