

NON NEGOTIABLE PART III

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

More questions?

7. (37:12) The brothers, except for Yoseph and Binyamin, went to Shechem to oversee Yakov's sheep. Rashi points out that the brothers had ulterior motives for going together to Shechem. Shechem had been the scene of their battle against Shechem. It was where the brothers had expressed their collective unity in defense of the family (Dina) and in opposition and disregard of all the other city-states. It was where they proclaimed to Yakov, "Should Shechem to treat our sister like a harlot?" They felt that the situation with Yoseph warranted a "family meeting." They had to decide how to deal with what they perceived as a danger to the family from within. Shechem had been an attack from outside the family. Yoseph was a danger from within the family.

8. (37:13) Yakov, knowing that the brothers "hated" Yoseph, instructed Yoseph to go and join his brothers in Shechem. Why would he have done so? The brothers were older than Yoseph and assumingly more experienced shepherds than him. What report (37:14) did Yakov need that he would subject Yoseph to the animosity of his brothers?

9. Yoseph immediately agreed to do so. Rashi references the Medresh that points out Yoseph's "humility." Yoseph was willing to do as Yakov instructed even though he knew that his brothers hated him. Why does the Medresh classify his acquiescence as "humility?" If anything, it was courageous and respectful. Courageous because he knew that the brothers hated him and entering into their midst could not have been a pleasant prospect; and respectful, because he was listening to his father's direct request. Why does the Medresh classify it as humility?

10. (37:15-16) Yoseph went in search of his brothers and encountered "a man." The encounter is couched in enigmatic terms. Yoseph appeared to be lost. He met a Man who is not named. The Man asked Yoseph what he was seeking, not whom are you seeking. Yoseph answered, "I am seeking my brothers." The Man just happened to have overheard the brothers saying where they were going. Yoseph continued on toward his own enslavement and destiny. Why the mystery?

11. Rashi informs us (37:17) that the "Man" told Yoseph that the brothers went to Dothan "to find a legal reason to kill you." Clearly, the Torah is contrasting Yoseph's "I am seeking my brothers" with "they are seeking a legal reason to kill you." What was really going on with this prelude to Yoseph's sale into slavery?

Yoseph's destiny was to be the "Interim King." It was his responsibility to transition the developing

Jewish nation from the relative freedom of their lives in Canaan to the relative slavery in Mitzrayim. Like the Avos who preceded him, Yoseph was entrusted with the interpretive fulfillment of the Covenant Between the Halves. The first 190-year part of the prophecy, (15:13) "You will be strangers in a land that is not (yet) yours," was about to end. The 210 years of "And you will be enslaved and afflicted," was about to begin.

As the Interim King, Yoseph would have to win the trust of his brothers. Unfortunately, by the critical age of 17 the opposite had occurred. Rather than learning to trust their younger brother's vision of the future family and nation the brothers were convinced that Yoseph would cause their collective demise as Jews. In essence the brothers banded together in Shechem, more to fight for their own survival than to plan Yoseph's destruction.

Why were the brothers convinced that Yoseph would bring about their destruction?

A number of years ago we discussed the concept of "shalom" and its relationship to Yakov Avinu and the critical number 12. When Yakov awoke from his dream atop the Temple Mount he made a deal with the Almighty. (28:20-22) "If G-d will watch over me... provide for me... and return me "B'Shalom" - whole to my father's home... I will build this monument into the house of G-d."

Yakov asked G-d to bring him back from exile "whole to his father's home." Yakov prayed to G-d that he would be the last Av - Father (patriarch). Yakov prayed that where Avraham had a Yishmael and Yitzchak had an Eisav, he asked that all his children merit being part of the Jewish people.

For whatever reason, the Jewish nation required 12 sons who would become 12 Shevatim (tribes), and Yakov's deal with G-d was that he would be the Av, he would be the Chosen One, to sire those 12 sons. However, to successfully survive the machinations of Lavan and the hatred (or kisses) of Eisav he would need G-d's help.

There were no guarantees. Just as Yishmael and Eisav were lost to the Jewish people so too one or more of the twelve could also be lost. It was Yakov's promise to G-d that he would do everything humanly possible to raise his children to be true servants of G-d so that they would merit being part of the Jewish nation.

(With this approach we can better understand the Medresh of the stones fighting with each other, miraculously becoming a single stone, and Yakov anointing that stone as the "corner stone" of the Bais Hamikdash. Keep in mind that the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed because of unwarranted hatred and will be rebuilt when the hatred is no more.)

It appears that ever since the inception of the Jewish people there has been a level of Sinas Chinum - unwarranted strife and conflict. (Contrast that with the Medresh on the two brothers, partners in the field atop the Temple mount.) The origin of Yakov's family was certainly beset by challenges testing the levels of the family's resolve toward building a unified and intra-supportive nation. First Yakov had to protect his family from Eisav and Lavan. After returning to Canaan he fought a number of

decisive battles against the local city-states to secure a place for his family. Finally, after a moment of reprieve, the conflict between Yoseph and his brothers erupted.

All the brothers knew that they were intended to be the progenitors of the 12 tribes; however, Yoseph's royal posturing made him suspect and they concluded that he wanted more than to be one on the twelve. He wanted to be the "fourth" Patriarch who would sire the 12 essential sons / tribes. If that were the case, what would become of the other brother's? The brother's concluded that if Yoseph was to be the fourth Av and the progenitor of 12 other sons who would become the basis of the Jewish nation they would be relegated to the status of "one of the other nations." Neither the Torah nor the land of Canaan would ever be theirs. That is why they feared Yoseph and his dreams. That is why they believed they had to eliminate him.

On the other hand, Yoseph had no such dreams of Fatherhood. He knew that he would be the Interim King while the family transitioned into slavery and nationhood. He knew he was different than his brothers and embraced the responsibility and the loneliness. Unfortunately, believing that his dreams were prophetic he pushed his brothers to confirm his position as Interim King. As the second to youngest brother, and believing him to be dangerous to them, they would not do so.

(As an aside, Yoseph believed his dreams were prophetic and in rest of the family; therefore, he felt obligated to share them with his brothers. However, the dreams may have been prophetic but they were not necessarily prophecy. The difference being that the dreams were intended for Yoseph and Yoseph alone to help him prepare for his personal destiny as the Interim King. Had he first shared the dreams with his father, Yakov would have underscored their importance and been able to advise him not to yet share them with his brothers.)

Following Yoseph's second dream, Yakov realized Yoseph's mistake. Instead of being critical and demanding, Yoseph needed to be conciliatory, encouraging, humble, and embracing. He first needed to win their trust as a brother before they would trust him to be their leader.

In 37:13-14 Yakov dispatched Yoseph to seek "the peace of his brothers", or in other words, "the wholeness of his brothers." Yakov did not need Yoseph to bring back an accounting of his flocks. He wanted to hear from Yoseph that he had made up with his brothers and that he was "one of them." Yakov wanted Yoseph to apologize to his brothers for his critical and demanding nature and to win a place of trust among them. Visions and multicolored coats were not enough - only the future would tell the real meaning and timing of his prophetic dreams. Yakov sent Yoseph in search of his brothers because he wanted to know that his deal with G-d, "and I will return Shalaim - whole to my father's home" was secure, alive, and well.

Rashi classified Yoseph's immediate acquiescence as humility because it asked Yoseph to rethink his entire approach to his brothers. More so than that, Yakov placed the burden of apology and making the first move upon Yoseph. He seemingly did not demand that the other brothers take equal responsibility for their animosity toward Yoseph. Yoseph could have felt that his father was not

being fair. Yoseph could have argued his position in hope of swaying Yakov that he was not the one at fault. Yoseph could have argued his position in hope of avoiding the unpleasantness of what Yakov was demanding of him. However, Yoseph did not do so; instead, Yoseph accepted Yakov's criticism, full blame, and the obligation to do whatever he could to make amends. For Yoseph the issue was not to place or avoid blame; the issue was to find a solution. Yoseph acted with humility. Yoseph acted the leader. Yoseph acted the king. (See Darash Moshe, Shemos 13:19)

The enigmatic episode with the unnamed "Man" by Shechem now begins to make sense. Yoseph, as we all know, was on a collision course with destiny. Not Yakov, Yoseph, nor the brothers knew that they were unwittingly conspiring to begin the stage of "and they will be enslaved." However, as the story will unfold, historians, scholars, critics, and students will question Yoseph's eventual motives. Were his manipulations in Parshas Miketz an act of revenge against his brothers or true leadership? Was he attempting to "teach them a lesson" or test the strength of their familial resolve and commitment to protect each other and survive - regardless? The Medresh tells us that the "Man" even informed him, or at least hinted, that his brothers were determined to kill him! It did not make a difference to Yoseph. It only proved Yakov's criticism while strengthening Yoseph's resolve to make amends before it was too late. Yoseph's encounter with the "Man" established the nobility of Yoseph's declaration, "It is my brother's that I seek." Yoseph's intent was humble and noble. Yoseph's intent was to apologize to them and ask forgiveness.

Yoseph's intent would remain noble and humble for the next 22 years as he grew to be the Interim King.

Twenty-two years later Yoseph had become the most powerful leader in the civilized world. Not knowing exactly how or when it would happen, he knew that world events were converging to advance the development of his family and the Jewish nation.

Upon seeing his brothers Yoseph suspected that the time had come. When his brothers bowed to him he knew the time had come. Yakov was right! The dreams were never intended for his brothers, (see Rabbi's Notebook Vayeshev) they had been intended only for him. It was his sign that the time had come for him to become the Interim King.

Imagine the moment. Yoseph has not seen his brothers for 21 years. In that time the understanding and acceptance of his personal destiny had become complete. Regarding his brothers, Yoseph's greatest desire was to reveal his identity and embrace them; however, he could not do so. First, he had to know "the strength of their familial resolve and commitment to protect each other and survive regardless." It wasn't enough that he had his place in the destiny of the Jewish people and was prepared to do anything to serve and protect his family. He had to find out if his brother's were equally determined. Had they learned the fundamental lesson that brothers do not sell their brother into slavery, regardless of reason or rational! Therefore, Yoseph immediately wove a web of accusation and innuendo around them with the sole purpose of testing their commitment to the

whole and part of the family. Basically, he pitted individual safety against the safety and survival of the family. "One of you returns while the rest stay in prison." Three days later, "One of you will stay and the rest will return; however, you must bring back the youngest or suffer hunger and starvation."

When Moshe fled Egypt because a fellow Jew had told Pharaoh that Moshe had killed the Egyptian overseer he proclaimed, "Now I know Moshe meant that he finally understood why the Jews were enslaved, persecuted and in exile. What sin had they done to deserve the debasement and pain? Their sin was the obvious disunity, selfishness, jealousy, and disregard that allowed one Jew to turn in another! "Now I know why!"

Yoseph understood that the survival of the family and the development of the nation were predicated on their unyielding support and commitment to each other, regardless! Trust in G-d and each other was the only tools they had to battle the seductive assimilation of Egypt, and trust in each other demanded a belief that each of them was as important to each other as they were to themselves. (The power of sincerity, passion, and unqualified love.) So long as the brothers could still rationalize the survival of the nation against the worth of the individual they would not survive exile. The strength of the Jewish nation is that every one is considered an entire world unto himself. No one can decide that another's blood is less red or valuable. Self-sacrifice can only be volunteered but never mandated.

How important was Shimon? How important was Binyamin? How important was Yakov's pain? How important was Yoseph? Weren't they all as valuable as Dina's?" Should we have allowed Shechem treat sister Yoseph knew that his brothers lived the principle that family was a non-negotiable they could not be brought to Mitzrayim.

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