

YOSEF: MAN OF SHALOM

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Sponsored by
Milton Cahn
in memory of
his mother Abby Cahn
(Bracha bat Moshe a"h)
and his wife Felice Cahn
(Faygah Sarah bat Naftoli Zev a"h)

Eli and Philip Rutstein and families
on the yahrzeits of
their mother, Pearl bat Moshe David
(Pearl Rutstein) a"h
their grandfather, Nachman ben Asher Halevi a"h
(Nathan Rutstein)
and family friend Dr. Lenny Schlossberg a"h

We read in our Parashah (45:1), "Yosef could not restrain himself in the presence of all who stood before him, so he called out, 'Remove everyone from before me!' Thus no one remained with him when Yosef made himself known to his brothers." Midrash Tanchuma comments that Yosef behaved improperly, for he risked his life by remaining alone with his brothers, who did not yet know his identity. Nevertheless, Yosef found that risk preferable to shaming his brothers in front of the Egyptians when he identified himself.

R' Chaim ben Attar z"l (1696-1743) writes, citing the Zohar, that there are seven Tzaddikim who parallel the seven days of the week. The tzaddik who parallels Shabbat is Yosef. Shabbat is associated with Shalom / peace or harmony, as reflected in the greeting, "Shabbat Shalom," and the blessing said in Ma'ariv, "Ha'porais Sukkat Shalom / He who spreads the shelter of peace over us . . ." (Ohr Ha'chaim to Vayikra 19:3)

What is the connection between Shabbat and Shalom? R' Aryeh Finkel z"l (1931-2016; Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva in Modi'in Ilit, Israel) explains: Our Sages say that Shabbat is the source of all blessing. And, the Mishnah (end of Tractate Uktzin) states: "Hashem found no vessel that could hold a blessing other than shalom." Thus, the blessing of Shabbat requires Shalom.

R' Finkel continues: In light of the Midrash quoted above, we can see how Yosef exemplifies the trait of Shalom, preferring to risk his life rather than shame another person. In next week's Parashah we read, as well (50:21), how Yosef "comforted them and spoke to their hearts." Similarly, says the Midrash, at the time of the Final Redemption, Hashem will console Yerushalayim and speak to her heart (see Yeshayah 40:1-2). (Yavo Shiloh)

"Vayigash / Yehuda approached him . . ." (44:18)

According to one interpretation in Midrash Rabbah, "him" (or "Him") refers to Hashem, i.e., Yehuda approached G-d in prayer before confronting Yosef. R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Yadler z"l (Yerushalayim; 1843-1917) asks: Why, then, does the verse use a pronoun ("him") whose antecedent appears to be Yosef?

He answers: Yehuda approached Yosef in order to pray because prayer is more efficacious if the person praying is standing close to the person or thing about whom or which he is praying. (Tiferet Zion)

"Yosef said to his brothers, 'I am Yosef; is my father still alive?'" (45:3)

Hadn't Yehuda told Yosef moments earlier (verse 44:31) that Yaakov would die if Binyamin did not return? Obviously, then, Yaakov was alive!

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1784-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) explains: Yosef was saying, "You may find it unbelievable that I am indeed Yosef. I find it equally unbelievable that my father Yaakov did not die of sorrow when I disappeared. If it can indeed be true that my father is still alive, it likewise can be true that I am Yosef." (Chochmat Ha'Torah)

"Behold! Your eyes see, as do the eyes of my brother, Binyamin, that it is my mouth that is speaking to you." (45:12)

R' Shmuel Ehrenfeld z"l (1835-1883; rabbi of Mattersdorf, Hungary) explains: Yosef was afraid that, after he had treated his brothers so harshly, Yaakov would not want to come to live with him in Egypt. Therefore he said, "You can see--and especially Binyamin, with whom I always had a strong bond, can see--that it was only my mouth--not my heart, not my true feelings--that spoke to you so

harshly. (Chatan Sofer: Introduction)

Rashi z"l explains our verse as Yosef's way of confirming his true identity: "It is my mouth that is speaking to you' – in the Holy Tongue [i.e., Hebrew]."

R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (Ramban; 1194-1270) asks: How does speaking Hebrew prove that the speaker was Yosef? Surely, some Egyptians were familiar with the language!

R' Moshe Greenes z"l (rabbi in Brooklyn, N.Y.; died 1992) answers Ramban's question based on the answer to another question: Halachah attributes great significance to a person's voice. For example, a blind man is allowed to seclude himself with his wife even though he can't see her to verify her identity because he recognizes her voice. Why didn't Yosef's brothers recognize his voice?

R' Greenes answers: Yosef and his brothers grew up speaking to each other in Hebrew. In contrast, in all of last week's Parashah and the beginning of this week's Parashah, Yosef did not speak to his brothers in Hebrew; he spoke to them in Egyptian and an interpreter translated. Voice recognition is not effective when the speaker is speaking a different language than the listener is used to hearing him speak, so Yosef's brothers did not recognize him. This is what Yosef meant when he said, "It is my mouth that is speaking to you' – in the Holy Tongue"--not because he could speak Hebrew and no other Egyptian could; other Egyptians also spoke Hebrew. Rather, Yosef meant, "Now that I am speaking our mother tongue, you can recognize my voice." (Karan Pnei Moshe)

"His sons and grandsons with him, his daughters and granddaughters and all his offspring he brought with him 'Mitzrymah' / to Egypt." (46:7)

R' Mordechai Hakohen z"l (1523–1598; rabbi in Tzefat, Eretz Yisrael, and Aleppo, Syria; a student of one of the leading students of the Arizal) asks: This verse seems to be superfluous, as the previous verse says, "They came to Egypt -- Yaakov and all his offspring with him."

He explains: This verse is teaching that Yaakov took the souls of all future Jews into exile in Egypt with him so that they would "see" G-d's miracles and wonders and receive the Torah at Har Sinai. This is how we are able to say in the Pesach Haggadah: "In every single generation, one is obligated to see himself as if he personally came out of Egypt. It was not only our forefathers whom the Holy One redeemed from slavery; we, too, were redeemed with them, as it is written (Devarim 6:23), 'He brought us out from there'." Similarly, we say in our daily prayers [in Nusach Sefard], "Emet / Truly, You redeemed us from Egypt," not, "You redeemed our ancestors." [In Nusach Ashkenaz, the word "Emet" is not said at this point, though the blessing containing the phrase, "You redeemed us from Egypt," does begin with "Emet."] Another reason why all of the souls had to be in Egypt was to prepare them for the long exiles later in Jewish history.

R' Mordechai notes: The Gematria of "Mitzrymah" / "to Egypt" (385) equals the Gematria of "Moshe Go'el" / "Moshe Redeemer," indicating that Bnei Yisrael's redeemer came to Egypt with them.

Regarding the time of the Exodus we read (Shmot 13:18), "Bnei Yisrael went up from Egypt 'Chamushim'." One of the interpretations of "Chamushim" is that only a small percentage of Bnei Yisrael left Egypt. R' Mordechai explains: Only a small percentage of the Jewish People left Egypt in a physical body. The rest, i.e., the future generations, left Egypt in a hidden form, as souls only. This is alluded to as follows: The word "Chamushim" ("Chamushim") is spelled chet (chet-tav), mem (mem-mem), shin (shin-yud-nun), yud (yud-vav-dalet), mem (mem-mem). The "hidden" part of each of those letters (for example, the 'tav' of 'chet-tav' and the 'yud-nun' of 'shin-yud-nun') has a combined Gematria of 550, which equals the Gematria of "Atidin" / "those who are in the future." This hints that the future generations left Egypt in a hidden form. (Siftei Kohen)

A Torah Tour of the Holy Land

"It happened in the ninth year of [Tzidkiyahu's] reign, in the tenth month [Tevet, the tenth month counting from Nissan, which the Torah calls the first month], on the tenth of the month, that Nevuchadnetzar, king of Babylonia, came--he and his entire army--[to wage war] against Yerushalayim, and they encamped near it and built a siege tower around it." (Melachim II 25:1-2)

The Shulchan Aruch states (549:1): "We are obligated to fast on the ninth of Av, the seventeenth of Tammuz, the third of Tishrei, and the tenth of Tevet because of the bad things that happened on those days."

R' Yisrael Meir Hakohen z"l (the Chafetz Chaim; died 1933) elaborates: The obligation to fast comes from the words of the Prophets, as the verse states (Zechariah 8:19), "Thus said Hashem, Master of Legions, 'The fast of the fourth [month], the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, . . .'" Our Sages say: . . . The "fast of the tenth" is the Tenth of Tevet, which is the tenth month. On all of these days, the Jewish People fast because of the troubles that occurred on these days, in order to awaken our hearts and cause us to inspect our ways, so that we will repent. These days serve as a reminder of our bad deeds and those of our ancestors, so bad that they led to these sorrows for them and for us. If we remember these things, we will change our ways for the better. . . Therefore, every person is obligated to pay attention on these days and to examine his deeds and repent from them, for fasting is not the main point. . . Rather, fasting is a preparation for repentance. . .

The Chafetz Chaim adds: We fast on the tenth of Tevet because, on that day, the wicked Nevuchadnetzar, king of Babylonia, brought Yerushalayim under siege, which led to the Churban / Destruction [of the Temple]. (Mishnah Berurah 549:1-2)