Parashas Mikeitz

Parsha Summary

After two years, Pharaoh dreams of seven thin cows swallowing seven fat cows, and seven shriveled grain-stalks swallowing seven plumb grain-stalks, and he seeks an interpreter. The wine-officer remembers Yosef as a dream interpreter, and so he is brought before Pharaoh, and Yosef says that God is telling Pharaoh that there will be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine, so he should appoint someone to collect grain during the years of plenty to provide for the nation during the famine. Pharaoh appoints Yosef as vice-ruler of Egypt to collect the grain, gives him a wife (Osnat) and Yosef has two sons before the famine begins.

Yaakov's family needs to buy grain during the years of famine, so ten of the brothers go to Egypt to buy grain from Yosef while they leave Binyamin with his father. The brothers do not recognize Yosef, but he recognizes them and speaks to them harshly. Yosef accuses the ten men of spying and imprisons them for three days. When they insist that they are all brothers but the youngest is at home, he commands them to return home and bring their brother Binyamin. Yosef keeps Shimon in prison and allows the brothers to buy grain and go home, but he secretly has their money returned to their sacks. The brothers discover that their money has been returned, and are afraid; they tell Yaakov of all that happened but he refuses to allow them to take Binyamin to Egypt. The famine continues, and Reuvain attempts to convince Yaakov to let them buy more grain from Egypt with Binyamin, but Yaakov is only convinced by Yehudah who swears that he will guarantee Binyamin's safety.

The brothers and Binyamin come to Yosef in Egypt, bringing with them gifts and double the money for the grain, to return what they believe has accidentally been placed in their sacks. Yosef frees Shimon and treats them all kindly: he has them to eat with him, and claims that they had already paid for the grain the first time. Yosef has their sacks filled with grain, but secretly orders his silver goblet to be hidden in Binyamin's sack. Once the brothers have left, Yosef's servant chases after them, accusing them of stealing Yosef's goblet, and finds it among Binyamin's grain. The brothers tear their clothing and are brought back to Yosef, who wants to keep Binyanim as a slave to punish him.

Classic Questions

Why did Yosef hide his identity and cause so much anguish to his family?

- Several modern scholars believed that Yosef felt estranged from his long-forgotten family
- **Radak (42:9, 44:1)**: Yosef wanted to cause them distress without harming them
    - [perhaps as revenge for what they did to him?]
- **R. Avraham ben HaRambam**, **Ramban, etc**: Yosef was trying to ensure that his dreams came to fruition (as he probably considered them to be a form a prophecy)
    - **Drashot Rabbeinu Yonah**: Yosef also believed that God must be arranging events such that his family would come to Egypt without knowing about Yosef
- **Bechor Shor (36:26, 42:7):** when the brothers decided to sell Yosef instead of killing him, they made him swear that he never reveal to their father how he ended up a slave, so Yosef had to force his brothers into revealing his identity to Yaakov themselves

- **Seforno, R. Yitzhak Arama, Abarbanel, R. Hirsch**: Yosef was trying to put the brothers in a position to do teshuvah for selling him, causing them to regret their deeds and place them in a position where they would have to defend one of their brothers (Binyamin)
    - **Ramban:** Yosef also wanted to see how they would treat Binyamin if they would be forced to defend him or abandon him
    - **R. Hirsch:** Yosef was also doing this for himself, to reconcile with his brothers
- **R. Shimon Schwab**: Yosef knew that Avraham was told by God that his descendants would be 'strangers in a foreign land', and Yosef believed that God must have put himself in a position to play the part of an oppressive ruler while secretly providing them with support (but his plan failed because he became emotionally overwhelmed)
- **R. Yoel bin-Nun**: Yosef was afraid that perhaps, like Yishmael and Eisav before him, his father Yaakov had actually rejected him and sent him away
    - This is suggested by **R. Shmuel Shraga Feigenson** in a note (link here)

If Yosef returned the money to all his brothers, why did only one of them find it on the way?

- **Radak**: Yosef placed the money on the top of one of the bags to torment them as they would travel, but he couldn't do that for all his brothers or they would return to Egypt
- **Ramban**: only one of the brothers had a weaker donkey which needed more grain
- **Ibn Caspi**: this was merely random and there is no need for any explanations
- **Vilna Gaon**: the one was Levi (Rashi), because once Shimon was captured, it was up to Levi to feed Shimon's donkey plus his own, so he took two portions of feed from his sack
- **Malbim**: the one was Levi (Rashi), and Yosef did this to punish him because Levi and Shimon were most responsible for what the brothers did to him

Important "Chazal"s and "Rashi"s

- There was no one to interpret [the dreams] for Pharoah, meaning that the interpreters were not to Pharoah's liking; they were saying to him that he would have seven daughters and end up burying them (Rashi)
- Pharaoh's advisors complained that a slave cannot be appointed ruler over them, but Pharaoh said that he saw rays of royalty in him. They said to challenge him to see if he knows all seventy languages, and the angel Gavriel taught him, adding a letter to his name (see Tehillim 81:5) so he would know all the languages (Sotah 36b)
- The "brothers of Yosef" descended to Egypt, that they intended to search for him (Rashi)
- Yosef was not recognized; he left without a beard and now had a beard (Yevamos 88a)
- [Yaakov referred to God as "Shaddai,"] Who will say 'enough' to my suffering (Rashi)

A Short Vort

Why would Pharaoh appoint Yosef as a viceroy just because he was good at interpreting dream? Pharaoh's advisors thought that the king's dreams reflect his own personal concerns. Yosef's interpretation showed that he understood that a leader dreams and cares about his entire nation, not just himself, proving that he is more worthy to be the king's treasurer.