

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

Part 1: introduction



ADDITION, SUBTRACTION

Genesis 30:22-24ⁱ

וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת רָחֵל וַיִּשְׁמַע אֲלֶיהָ
אֱלֹהִים וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת רִחְמָהּ: וַתֵּהָר וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן
וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסָּף אֱלֹהִים אֶת חֲרָפְתִּי: וַתִּקְרָא
אֶת שְׁמוֹ יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר יֹסֵף יְהוּה לִי בֶן אֲחִיר:

Now God remembered Rachel; God heeded her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son, and said: “*God has taken away [א-ס-ף] my disgrace.*” So she named him Joseph, which is to say: “*May the Eternal One add [י-ס-ף] another son for me.*”

Genesis Rabbah 73:5

אסף אלהים את חרפתי — א”ר לוי בר זכריה
עד שלא תלד האשה הסרחון נתלה בה,
לאחר שתלד תלוי בבנה, מאן אכל הדא
מקמתא ברך, מאן תבר הדא מקמתא אלא
ברך.

God has taken away my disgrace. Rabbi Levi bar-Z’charyah said: before a woman has a child, things she does wrong are attributed to her. But once she has a child, she can blame them! “*Who ate that?*” “*Your son!*” “*Who broke that?*” “*Your son!*”

Yashar to Genesis 30:24

יסף ה’ לי — כי ידעה שעוד בן אחד יוליד
יעקב, והתפללה שיהיה הבן ההוא נולד
ממנה ולא מאחרת.

May the Eternal One add for me. She knew that Jacob was to have precisely one more son, and prayed that he would be born to her rather than to one of the other wives.

WILL THE REAL JOSEPH PLEASE STAND UP?

Pesikta Rabbati, piska 3

והרי כל שבחו של יוסף שהיה
מפליג על כבוד אביו ולא נכנס
אצלו בכל שעה ... שלא רצה

And behold, Joseph was widely praised for treating his father with absolute respect. Once Jacob came to join him in Egypt, Joseph never visited – not even for a single hour – to avoid being alone one-on-one with him.

ⁱ NJPS translation

להתייחד עם אביו שלא יאמר לו
היאך עשו בך אחיך ומקללים.

For he did not want his father to ask, “*What really happened with you and your brothers?*” lest Jacob end up cursing them.

Genesis Rabbah 87:3

ויהי יוסף יפה תואר ויפה מראה
— לגבור שהיה עומד בשוק
וממשמש בעיניו ומתקן בשערו
ומתלה בעקיבו אמר לי נאה, לי
יאי, נאה גבור.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome (Genesis 39:6). He was like a strong man who liked to mince around in the marketplace, putting make-up on his eyes, touching up his hair, raising his heels, and saying: “I’m so fine, I look so great, I am quite the man!”

Rabbi Sylvia Rothschildⁱⁱ

All the words that began this story, the terrible words that Joseph spoke about his brothers, the words of peace they could barely bring themselves to utter, the words of his dreams, the words he was to bring back to his father – all those words at the beginning of Joseph’s stories descended into silence when Joseph descended into the pit, and the silence became heavier and heavier until the moment of the family reunion in Egypt, until Joseph could no longer suppress the words, no longer restrain himself.

But this time his words were changed, they became the words of a man who had transformed himself, not just from the arrogant sibling who considered that the universe should worship him, into a caring and beneficent brother; not just from immigrant slave to ruling prince. The transformation was from spoiled and self-centred brat into a righteous man, a man able to forgive the wrongs done to him, a man able to transcend his history and reflect not only his humanity, but the reflection of God that is at the core of all humanity. The heavy silence was not a time of nothingness but a time of real change.

ⁱⁱ Rabbi Sylvia Rothschild, “Vayeshev – the transformation from brat to tzadik begins here” (5 December 2017): <<https://rabbisylviarothschild.com/2017/12/05/vayeshev-the-transformation-from-brat-to-tzadik-begins-here/>>

Professor Samuel J Levineⁱⁱⁱ

The story of Joseph presents some of the most challenging questions of all biblical narratives. Joseph's behaviour, interpersonal relationships and personal journey and development are often difficult to understand, and at times seem to defy explanation. Leading commentators are repeatedly puzzled both by Yosef's actions and by the events that surround him: from Joseph's bitter interchanges with his brothers, which his father Jacob is apparently unable to mediate, to the events in the Land of Egypt, where Joseph finds both failure and remarkable success, to Joseph's strange machinations when his brothers travel to Egypt to purchase food.

Commentators have offered a variety of approaches in an effort to understand and explain many of these difficulties. Yet, these explanations tend to be incomplete, often responding to individual events and aspects of the story, without providing a cohesive understanding of the story as a whole and the puzzling ways Joseph interacts with others. Moreover, although commentators sometimes find common ground in their views of certain episodes, their approaches often contradict one another, and at times their interpretations of different events seem inherently inconsistent.

ⁱⁱⁱ Samuel J Levine, *Was Yosef on the Spectrum? Understanding Joseph through Torah, midrash and classical Jewish sources* (Jerusalem: Urim, 2020): introduction (ebook edition).

Rabbi Professor Jonathan Magonet^{iv}

Is it legitimate to describe the story of Joseph as a soap opera? Does that not diminish something that is part of the Bible itself? Or rather, what distinguishes a biblical story from a soap opera? Perhaps biblical stories are the equivalent of the soap operas of an earlier age. That is to say they fulfil some of the same purposes. Biblical stories carried the memory of the people's history and of the personalities who had created that history. By telling those stories the characters remained alive. It has been said that we are not truly dead until there is no one left to remember us. But telling the stories also provided some kind of teaching for the present time. How the great figures of the tradition had dealt with events could be a model for how to deal with them today. Though sometimes the lessons might be how not to make the same kind of mistakes this time.

Nevertheless, one difference is important. Soap operas come to us as passive observers in words and pictures on television. We are robbed of the opportunity of using our own imagination to picture what is happening. We do not even need the discipline of reading that forces us to think about what is being told to us and what is going on between the lines. But our Jewish tradition of reading from the Torah on a weekly basis keeps both the stories and the written text before our eyes. So it remains our responsibility to try to understand these stories, and ourselves make the interpretation that relates them to our lives.

^{iv} Jonathan Magonet, *A Rabbi Reads the Torah* (Norwich: SCM Press, 2013): 34-35.

Notes...

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

Part 2: a blended family



WIVES

Rashi to Genesis 29:18ⁱ

ויאהב יעקב את־רחל ויאמר אעבדך
שבע שנים ברחל בתך הקטנה — כל
הסימנים הללו למה, לפי שידוע בו
שהוא רמאי אמר לו אעבדך ברחל,
ושמא תאמר רחל אחרת מן השוק,
תלמוד לומר בתך, ושמא תאמר
אחליף ללאה שמה ואקרא שמה
רחל, תלמוד לומר הקטנה, ואף על פי
כן לא הועיל לו שהרי רמהו.

b.Megillah 13b

אמרה ליה ... אבא רמאה הוא, ולא
יכלת ליה ... אמר לה: ומאי
רמיותא? אמרה ליה: אית לי
אחתא דקשישא מינאי, ולא מנסיב
לי מקמה. מסר לה סימנים. כי מטא
ליליא, אמרה: השתא מיבספא
אחתאי, מסרתינהו ניהלה.

Jacob loved Rachel, so he said: I will serve you for seven years, in exchange for your younger daughter Rachel. Why did he describe her so precisely? Because he knew that Laban was a trickster. Jacob's basic meaning was that he would serve Laban for Rachel. But in case Laban tried to fob him off with some other, random Rachel picked up in the marketplace, he specified: *your daughter*. And in case Laban was tempted to swap his two daughters' names, he specified: *younger*.ⁱⁱ But despite all these safeguards, Laban still tricked him.

Rachel said to Jacob: *"My father is a trickster and you'll never beat him."* Jacob asked: *"What sort of trickery is he planning?"* Rachel replied: *"I have an older sister, and he will not marry me off ahead of her."* So Jacob gave her some secret signs. But that night, Rachel thought to herself: *"My sister will be humiliated!"* so she taught Leah the secret signs.

ⁱ Derived from Genesis Rabbah 70:17

ⁱⁱ In modern Hebrew, the expression ברחל בתך הקטנה – *As Rachel, your younger daughter* – means 'with absolute precision'. As in, one might tell a child ברחל בתך הקטנה that they must be in bed by 9pm.

Genesis Rabbah 70:19

וכל ההוא ליליא הוה צווח לה רחל
והיא עניא ליה, בצפרא והנה היא
לאה אמר לה מה רמייתא בת רמאה
לאו בליליא הוה קרינא רחל ואת ענית
לי, אמרה ליה אית ספר דלית ליה
תלמידים לא כך היה צווח לך אבוך
עשו ואת עני ליה.

All night, Jacob called her ‘Rachel’ and she responded as such.
Then, in the morning, and behold she was Leah (Genesis 29:25). He
said to her: “Why, you are a trickster, daughter of a trickster! Did I not
call you ‘Rachel’ all night and you answered me?” She replied: “Is there
a teacher without students? If I remember rightly, when your father
called you ‘Esau’, you answered him!”ⁱⁱⁱ

Aviva Gottlieb Zornberg^{iv}

Jacob is now married to two women. A storm of emotion – hatred, jealousy – replaces the calm harbour of fulfilment. And a profound frustration underlies the relationships between Jacob and his two wives. Leah loves Jacob; Jacob loves Rachel; while Rachel’s main passion is for children. Essentially, all the protagonists most want what they cannot have. In this sense, the compulsion of desire continues to drive them, even after the apparent resolution of marriage.

Pesikta d’Rav Kahana 1:7

ויביאו את קרבנם לפני יהוה שש
עגלות — כנגד ששת ימי בראשית ...
שש ערכי המשנה ... שש האימהות.

*The tribal chiefs brought their offerings before the Eternal One in six
carts (Numbers 7:3). This symbolises the six days of creation, the six
sections of the Mishnah, and the six matriarchs.*

ⁱⁱⁱ Genesis 27:32

^{iv} Aviva Gottlieb Zornberg, *Genesis: the beginning of desire* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995): 209-210.

SIBLINGS

Ramban to Genesis 38:2

בני יעקב ישתמרו מלישא כנעניות
כאשר צוה אביהם יצחק גם אברהם
... רבי יהודה אומר תאומות נולדו
עם השבטים ונשאום [...] אבל הלא
אחותו מן האם אסורה ולדעת רבי
יהודה יצטרכו בני לאה לשאת
תאומות ששה האחרים והם ישאו
שלהם.

Genesis 30:14-16^{viii}

וַיֵּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן בְּיָמֵי קָצִיר חֲטִים וַיִּמְצָא
דִּודָאִים בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיָּבֵא אֹתָם אֶל לָאָה
אִמּוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר רָחֵל אֶל לָאָה תֵּנִי נָא לִי
מִדִּודָאִי בֵּנֶה: וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ הִמָּעַט
קִחְתְּךָ אֶת אִישִׁי וְלָקַחְתְּ גַּם אֶת דִּודָאִי
בְּנִי וַתֹּאמֶר רָחֵל לָכֵן יִשְׁכַּב עִמָּךְ
הַלַּיְלָה תַּחַת דִּודָאִי בֵּנֶה: וַיָּבֵא יַעֲקֹב
מִן הַשָּׂדֶה בָּעֶרֶב וַתֵּצֵא לָאָה לִקְרָאתוֹ
וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלַי תָּבוֹא כִּי שָׁכַר שְׂכָרְתִּיךָ
בְּדִודָאִי בְּנִי וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּה בַּלַּיְלָה הוּא:

The sons of Jacob made certain not to marry Canaanite women, as their ancestors Isaac and Abraham had commanded.^v Rabbi Yehudah says: *“Twin sisters were born with each of them, and they married them.”*^{vi} But are we not told that it is forbidden to marry the daughter of one’s own mother? So Rabbi Yehudah must have meant that Leah’s sons married the daughters born to the other wives – paternal half-sisters – and *vice versa*.^{vii}

Once, at the time of the wheat harvest, Reuben came upon some mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah: *“Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.”* But Leah said to her: *“Was it not enough for you to take away my husband, that you would also take my son’s mandrakes?”* Rachel replied: *“I promise, he shall lie with you tonight, in return for your son’s mandrakes.”*^{ix} When Jacob came home from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said: *“You are to sleep with me, for I have hired you with my son’s mandrakes.”* And he lay with her that night.

^v Genesis 28:1 and 24:3

^{vi} Genesis Rabbah 84:19

^{vii} So that’s alright then.

^{viii} NJPS translation

^{ix} Apparently mandrakes were believed to aid conception: Ramban to Genesis 30:14. (But Ibn Ezra *ad loc* pours characteristic scorn on the idea.)

Joseph and Aseneth 22, 24^x

The seven years of famine began. And Jacob heard about Joseph, his son, and came to Egypt with his entire kindred in the second year of the famine, and he dwelled in the land of Goshen. And Joseph and his wife Aseneth, the daughter of an Egyptian priest, went to the land of Goshen to see Jacob. And they ate and drank. And Joseph and Aseneth went back to their home.

Simeon and Levi, sons of Leah, escorted them, but the sons of Zilpah and Bilhah, the servants of Leah and Rachel respectively, did not join in escorting them because they envied them and they were at enmity with them. For Pharaoh's son had lied to them, saying: "*I heard Joseph speaking to my father about you, saying, 'Dan, Gad, Naphtali, and Asher are children of my father's servants. They are not my brothers. I will wait for the death of my father, and I will wipe out them and their offspring so that they not be joint heirs with us, because they are children of servants.'*"

^x Patricia Ahearne-Kroll's translation: "Joseph and Aseneth" in Louis H Feldman, James L Kugel and Lawrence H Schiffman (eds), *Outside the Bible: ancient Jewish writings related to Scripture* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2013): 2,525-2,598.

Notes...

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

Part 3: the dreamcoat



SUITED AND BOOTED

Virginia Woolfⁱ

It is clothes that wear us and not we them; we may make them take the mould of arm or breast, but they mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking.

WHO MADE THE COAT?

Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 20

רבי אליעזר בן יעקב אומר מן העור
שהפשיט הנחש עשה הקדוש ברוך הוא
כתנות כבוד לאדם ולעזרו, שנאמר ויעש ה'
אלהים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבשם.

Rabbi Eliezer ben-Ya'akov says that from the skin of the serpent, the Holy One made honourable cloaks for Adam and his mate, as it is said: *And the Eternal God made cloaks of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them (Genesis 3:21).*

Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 24

רבי יהודה אומר הכתנת שעשה
הקדוש ברוך הוא לאדם ... היתה
עמם בתבה, וכשיצאו מן התבה
לקחה חם בן נח והוציאה עמו
והנחילה לנמרוד. ובשעה שהיה
לובש אותה, היו כל בהמה חיה
ועוף באין ונופלין לפניו.
כסבורין שהוא מכח גבורתו,
לפיכך המליכוהו עליהם מלך ...
עשו אחיו של יעקב ראה את
הכתנת ... על נמרוד, וחמד אותם
בלבו, והרגו ולקח אותם ממנו.

Rabbi Yehudah says that the cloak the Holy One made for Adam was handed down from generation to generation until they reached Noah, who took it onto the ark with him. When the ark reached land, Noah's son Ham kept it, and passed it on to his son Cush, who passed it on to his son Nimrod. Whenever Nimrod wore it, every animal, bird and beast, would come and kneel before him. Reasoning that this must be due to Nimrod's own personal characteristics, the people of that time appointed him to rule over them. Esau – brother of Jacob – saw Nimrod wearing it, and greatly desired it, so he killed Nimrod and took the cloak from him.

ⁱ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: a biography* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1928; repr 2006): 138.

Genesis 27:15

וַתִּקַּח רִבְקָה אֶת בְּגָדֵי עֶשָׂו בְּנֶהָ
הַגָּדֹל הַחֲמֹדֶת אֲשֶׁר אָתָּה בְּבֵית
וַתַּלְבֵּשׁ אֶת יַעֲקֹב בְּנֶהָ הַקָּטָן:

And Rebekkah took the most precious garment of her elder son Esau, which he had left in the house, and dressed her younger son Jacob in them.

Genesis 37:3

וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת יוֹסֵף מִכָּל בְּנָיו כִּי בֶן זִקְנִים
הוּא לוֹ וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים:

And Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons, for Joseph was the son of his old age. And he made him a fine cloak.

An obscure Yemenite midrashⁱⁱ

כתנת פסים — הכתנת שעשה הקב"ה לאדם
... היא שלקחה עשו מנמרוד והיא בגדי עשו
החמודות שלבש יעקב בשעת הברכה.

A fine cloak. This is the cloak that the Holy One made for Adam, that Esau took from Nimrod, the *most precious garment* of his which Jacob wore while receiving their father's blessing.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱⁱ Torah Sh'leimah , vol 6 p 1,399 gobbet 50: attributed to a Yemenite manuscript.

ⁱⁱⁱ Midrash Tanchuma Buber, Tol'dot 12 suggests that, after the whole Joseph episode, the cloak eventually became part of the High Priest's garb. (It understands the cloak as having reached Esau through a different route, via Shem, Abraham and Isaac, but I think the version where Nimrod gets killed is more fun.)

Rabbi Dr Rachel Adler^{iv}

I stand over the pit where I had buried the coveted cloak and dig,
brush off the dirt and lift it up: sheen of snakeskin,
fragile yet not worn thin by time, embroidered with crimson thread.

I wore this robe when I stood before my father:
This is the skin
that the Primordial Serpent shed
with a cry that travelled from one end of the Earth to the other.^v

And God wove the snakeskin into two robes,
one for her and one for him.

All the beasts of the field crowded round,
birds of the air swooped down, sea creatures
swarmed to the waters' edge to bask in the shimmer.

They all declared Adam and Eve king and queen of the Earth.

When Nimrod the Mighty Warrior wore the cloak,
Esau, my brother, saw how all the beasts of the field came
to bow down, from the gazelle to the turtle dove.

^{iv} Rachel Adler, "Jacob's Gift" in Michael Fishbane, Arthur Green and Jonathan D Sarna (eds), *Hiddushim: celebrating Hebrew College's centennial* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2022): 116-117. Abridged. The full version of this poem cleverly fuses the two different midrashic traditions of the cloak's inheritance (Shem vs Ham).

^v Cf Genesis Rabbah 20:5

Even the lion crouched at his feet purring like a Persian house cat.
What power! Esau took his bow and arrow and hunted
Nimrod down so that he might don its magic.

I now hold the shimmering cloak in my arms,
designer cloak of desire, that my mother foraged from Esau's wardrobe.
It smells of pungent jasmine and fresh blood.

I had slipped into the cloak like a seal into water.
My mother then overlaid the goat's hair-skin on my neck and arms
should the old man grope through blindness to skin.

When Esau heard, and pleaded: "*Bless me too, father!*"
He let out a cry that travelled from one end of the Earth to the other,
tore a gash in the clouds, rent the firmament.

I could not return it, even furtively, to his wardrobe
for he'd hunt me down as he had the Warrior.
Its smell made me nauseous. I buried it.

Now Joseph is seventeen. I hold the cloak in my arms,
dazzled by its beauty, its vertiginous power. I will give it to him,
as beautiful as his mother, for only he is worthy of its shimmer.

THE FAVOURITE SON

Chizkuni to Genesis 37:3

כתנת פסים — לשון פיוס ... כתונת
נאה כדי לפייסו.

A fine cloak. The word פסים, *fine*, actually relates to the concept of פיוס, 'conciliation'. The beautiful cloak was given to appease Joseph.

Radak ad loc

כי בן זקונים הוא לו — והלא
בשבע שנים נולדו כל בני יעקב,
אע"פ שנולד יוסף אחרון מה זקנה
היתה ליעקב בהולד יוסף משאר
בניו? אלא פירשו כי בן זקונים
הוא לו, כי היה מוצאו חכם בכל
דבריו כמו אם היה זקן.

For he was the son of his old age. But all the brothers were born within the space of seven years! Granted, Joseph was a younger one, but can we really say that Jacob was more of an old man than he had been when his other sons were born? Rather, we should understand this phrase to mean that Joseph was wise beyond his years, almost as if he were an old man.

Ramban ad loc

מנהג הזקנים שיקחו אחד מבניהם
הקטנים להיות עמו לשרתו, והוא נשען על
ידו תמיד לא יפרד ממנו, והוא נקרא לו בן
זקוניו בעבור שישרתו לזקוניו.

Elderly men used to appoint one of their younger sons as a carer. They would always be on hand. This is why Joseph was called *the son of his old age*: in the sense that he was an elder-carer.

Malbim ad loc

עשה לו כתנת פסים — כי יתר הבנים
שהיו תמיד בשדה עם הצאן לבשו
כדרך הרועים, אבל הוא שעמד בבית
לפני אביו היה צריך ללבוש בגדי כבוד
לכבוד אביו.

Jacob made him a fine cloak. The other sons were always in the field, with their flocks, and they dressed as shepherds. But because Joseph was based in the house – serving his father – he needed to dress honourably so as to reflect the status of his father.

Sforno ad loc

ועשה לו כתונת פסים — לאות שיהיה הוא
המנהיג בבית ובשדה.

Jacob made him a fine cloak. It was to show that Joseph was the master both of the household and of its attached land.^{vi}

Professor Samuel J Levine^{vii}

Common for a child on the spectrum, the uneven and unusual nature of Joseph's character makes it particularly difficult for both his peers and his father to fully understand him, prompting them to interact with him in correspondingly uneven and unhelpful ways. Out of his love for Joseph, Jacob attempts to resolve the conflicts that have arisen between Joseph and his brothers by accommodating Joseph with special treatment. In an apparent effort to bolster Joseph's status in his brothers' eyes, Jacob gives Joseph a special coat or garment that sets Joseph apart from his brothers and establishes his leadership.

^{vi} Sforno cites Isaiah 22:21 as another instance of clothing being used to denote authority and to prompt others to defer to the wearer. We might add Esther 5:1 and 6:11 as further examples.

^{vii} Samuel J Levine, *Was Yosef on the Spectrum? Understanding Joseph through Torah, midrash and classical Jewish sources* (Jerusalem: Urim, 2020): ch 2 (ebook edition).

Notes...

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

Part 4: siblings



YOU MAY SAY THAT I'M A DREAMER

Genesis 37:2-10ⁱ

יוסף בן שבע עשרה שנה היה רעה
את אחיו בצאן והוא נער את בני
בלהה ואת בני זלפה נשי אביו ויבא
יוסף את דבתם רעה אל אביהם: ...
ויראו אחיו כי אתו אהב אביהם מכל
אחיו וישנאו אותו ולא יכלו דברו
לשלם: ויחלם יוסף חלום ויגד לאחיו
ויוספו עוד שנא אתו: ויאמר אליהם
שמעו נא החלום הזה אשר חלמתי:
והנה אנחנו מאלמים אלמים בתוך
השדה והנה קמה אלמתי וגם נצבה
והנה תסבינה אלמתיכם ותשתחוין
לאלמתי: ויאמרו לו אחיו המלה
תמלה עלינו אם משול תמשל בנו
ויוספו עוד שנא אתו על חלמתי ועל
דבריו: ויחלם עוד חלום אחר ויספר
אתו לאחיו ויאמר הנה חלמתי חלום
עוד והנה השמש והירח ואחד עשר
בוכבים משתחוים לי: ויספר אל
אביו ואל אחיו ויגער בו אביו ויאמר
לו מה החלום הזה אשר חלמת הבוא
נבוא אני ואמך ואחיי להשתחוות לך
ארצה:

At seventeen years of age, Joseph tended the flocks with his brothers, as a helper to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. And Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father. And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him.

Once Joseph had a dream which he told to his brothers; and they hated him even more. He said to them: “*Hear this dream which I have dreamed: there we were binding sheaves in the field, when suddenly my sheaf stood up and remained upright; then your sheaves gathered around and bowed low to my sheaf.*” His brothers answered: “*Do you mean to reign over us? Do you mean to rule over us?*” And they hated him even more for his talk about his dreams.

He dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers, saying: “*Look, I have had another dream, and this time, the sun, the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.*” And when he told it to his father and brothers, his father berated him. “*What,*” he said to him, “*is this dream you have dreamed? Are we to come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow low to you to the ground?*”

ⁱ NJPS translation. This text is best accompanied by this extremely funny sketch from *The Jews Are Coming*: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-i-DMsFx6o>>

y.Pe'ah 1:1, 15b-16a

ויבא יוסף את דבתם רעה אל
אביהם — מה אמר ר"מ אמר
חשודים הן על אבר מן החי רבי
יהודה אומר מזלזלין הן בבני
השפחות ונוהגין בהן כעבדים ור"ש
אומר נותנין הן עיניהן בבנות
הארץ.

And Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father. What did he say? Rabbi Meir thought Joseph accused them of eating the flesh of live animals. Rabbi Yehudah thought Joseph accused them of disrespecting the sons of the handmaids, and treating them as slaves. And Rabbi Shimon thought he accused them of pursuing Canaanite girls.

Rabbi Sylvia Rothschildⁱⁱ

If we dream, then we can make things happen. Through our dreams, we imagine a world we want to live in. We can imagine a better tomorrow that we can help make happen. Dreams offer dress rehearsals for the reality yet to be. Yet precisely because dreams provide a chance to see ourselves as significant in changing our reality, they can be dangerous. Following our dream might also skew our sight of others. and perspective about what impact we may have. If we aspire too narrowly, letting our ambition be the driver in our lives so that we blot out the reality of others whose world we share, our dreams can become a deadly weapon. Our ambition and self-centredness following our own dreams can mean that we can hurt and demean others, and this is what Joseph did to his older brothers. We too have our dreams and our visions, and often we see them as being somehow stamped with the approval of the Almighty. But we should take the time to see our dreams from a different perspective, to look at how they look through the eyes of others. For what may appear to us as a deserved reward may seem to other parties involved as conquest, exploitation or marginalisation.

ⁱⁱ Rabbi Sylvia Rothschild, "One person's dream may be another person's nightmare: Sidra Vayeshev and the dream narratives of Joseph" (18 November 2013): <<https://rabbisylviarothschild.com/2013/11/18/one-persons-dream-may-be-another-persons-nightmare-sidra-vayeshev-and-the-dream-narratives-of-joseph/>>

THE FINAL CONFRONTATION

Genesis 37:13-20ⁱⁱⁱ

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֵךְ נָא רְאֵה אֶת שְׁלוֹם
אֶחָיָה וְאֶת שְׁלוֹם הַצֹּאן וְהַשְׂבָּנִי דִּבֶּר
... וַיָּבֹא שְׂכֶמָה: וַיִּמְצָאֵהוּ אִישׁ וְהִנֵּה
תֹּעָה בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּשְׁאַלְהוּ הָאִישׁ לֵאמֹר
מַה תִּבְקֹשׁ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶת אֶחָי אֲנֹכִי
מִבְּקֹשׁ הַגִּידָה נָא לִי אֵיפֹה הֵם
רְעִים: וַיֹּאמֶר הָאִישׁ נָסְעוּ מִזֶּה בִּי
שְׂמַעְתִּי אֲמָרִים גְּלֻכָּה דִּתִּינָה וַיֵּלֶךְ
יוֹסֵף אַחֵר אֶחָיו וַיִּמְצָאֵם בְּדוֹתָן:
וַיֵּרְאוּ אוֹתוֹ מֵרֶחֶק וּבְטָרֶם יִקְרַב
אֲלֵיהֶם וַיִּתְּנֻבְּלוּ אוֹתוֹ לְהַמִּיתוֹ:
וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל אֶחָיו הִנֵּה בַעַל
הַחֲלָמוֹת הֵלֵךְ בָּא: וְעַתָּה לָבוּ
וְנַהַרְגֵהוּ וְנִשְׁלַכֵּהוּ בְּאֶחָד הַבְּרוֹת
וְאָמְרֵנוּ חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתוֹ וְנִרְאָה
מַה יִּהְיֶה חֲלֻמֹּתָיו:

And Jacob said to Joseph, “Go and see how your brothers are and how the flocks are faring and bring me back word.”

When Joseph reached Shechem, a man came upon him wandering in the fields. The man asked him: “What are you looking for?” He answered: “I am looking for my brothers. Could you tell me where they are pasturing?” The man said: “They have gone from here, for I heard them say that they were going to Dothan.” So Joseph followed his brothers and found them at Dothan.

They saw him from afar, and before he came close to them they conspired against him, to kill him. They said to one another: “Here comes that dreamer! Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we can say, ‘A savage beast devoured him.’ We shall see what comes of his dreams!”

ⁱⁱⁱ NJPS translation

Professor Samuel J Levine^{iv}

When Joseph arrives at Shechem, his journey is interrupted by a meeting with an unnamed man who finds him wandering in the field. Without any further introduction, Joseph announces that he is looking for his brothers, and he requests that the man tell him where they are. Strikingly, Joseph assumes that upon a momentary encounter, a total stranger will have the ability to identify him, associate him with his brothers, and provide him information about his brothers' whereabouts. Individuals on the spectrum, who are absorbed in their own interests and concerns, sometimes hold the belief that others, including strangers, will be absorbed in their world as well. They may further incorporate these beliefs into the way they relate to and interact with others, leading them to behave in a manner that will be perceived as unusual or difficult to understand. According to the text, Joseph does not add any qualifiers to his request to this man, or otherwise show any indication that he considers the perspective of the person he has just met. Instead, he carries on the conversation only from his own perspective, with the assumption and expectation that a stranger is familiar with him and his family, and will know where he can find his brothers.

^{iv} Samuel J Levine, *Was Yosef on the Spectrum? Understanding Joseph through Torah, midrash and classical Jewish sources* (Jerusalem: Urim, 2020): ch 4 (ebook edition).

Hirsch to Genesis 37:18

ויתנכלו אתו להמיתו — החורש
מזימות על אחר איננו „מתנכל אותו“,
אלא „מתנכל בו“ ... לפי זה אפשר
לפרש „ויתנכלו אותו להם“: הם ראו
אותו כנוכל, תיארורו לעצמם כנוכל
... בשעה שקרב אליהם, תיארורו
לעצמם כאדם המסכן את עניניהם
העיקריים והקדושים ביותר, עד
להמיתו, עד שראו את עצמם זכאים
להמיתו בהגנה עצמית.

They conspired against him to kill him. In the case of one who plots to kill another, the Hebrew should use a different preposition. Accordingly, we can actually interpret the phrase as meaning not that they conspired against him, but that they identified him as a conspirator: they described him amongst themselves as a conspirator. As he approached them, they believed him to pose a danger to their most vital and sacred interests... unless he was killed. And they believed themselves to be permitted to kill him as an act of self-defence.^v

Sforno to Genesis 37:18, 42:28

חשבו את יוסף בלבם נוכל להמית
ושבא אליהם לא לדרוש שלום
אלא למצוא עליהם עלילה או
להחטיאם כדי שיקללם אביהם או
יענישם האל יתברך וישאר הוא
לבדו ברוך מבנים ... לשון להמיתו
שימית הוא את אחיו [...ואמרו...]
הנה המכירה לא היתה מאתנו
להרע אבל היתה מפני שחשבנוהו
לרודף ובן מות ומה שלא הרגנוהו
היה על צד החסד בהיותו אחינו:

The brothers believed that Joseph was conspiring to kill them, and that he was not approaching them with peaceful intent, but rather to snoop on them or entrap them into some wrongful act so that their father would curse them or God would punish them... leaving Joseph as the only remaining son, and the recipient of his father's blessing. So the word *kill* in our verse refers to Joseph causing the death of his brothers.^{vi} So they said to themselves: *“Selling him as a slave is hardly evil, because we have identified him as a mortal danger and are entitled to kill him. That we choose not to kill him is a concession on our part, because he is our brother.”*

^v Cf m.Sanhedrin 8:7

^{vi} I am not at all sure that this reading holds water grammatically. The word להמיתו, *kill*, is most definitely in the singular – *to kill him/it* – and would need to read להמיתם in order to bear the meaning *to kill them*.

Emet l'Ya'akov to Genesis 37:18

שאלני תלמיד א' איך צריך להסביר מה
שסיפרה התורה סיפורים אלו על אחי
יוסף, וכי אין זה בגדר לשון הרע? ...
באמת קושיא מעיקרא ליתא, דהרי אחי
יוסף דנו אותו למיתה על פי דין ...
וראיה מזה ששמותיהם חקוקים על
החושן שמכפר על עיוות הדין, ובודאי
הם כיוונו לשם שמים [...] זה יש ליישב
... מדוע לא הודיע יוסף ליעקב במשך
כל השנים שהיה במצרים שהוא חי,
דלפ"ז נראה שחשש יוסף שאם הוא
יודיע לאביו שהוא חי היו אחיו באים
למצרים להרגו, שהרי הם פסקו שהוא
חייב מיתה ... יש שמרגישים שאין זה
אלא דברי דרוש שנאמרו בכדי לחפות
על אבותינו שלא להוציא לעז עליהם.
אבל באמת המעיין היטב בכל הפרשה
יראה שדבר זה מוכח מתוכו ואי אפשר
שלא לומר כן ... הרי מוכח מתוך סיפור
הענין גופא שכל המחלוקת ביניהם
היתה על פי דיני רודף, ודו"ק היטב.

One of my students once asked me how we can justify the Torah telling this story about the brothers of Joseph: is it not evil speech which brings them into disrepute? But in fact the question is intrinsically flawed. The brothers sentenced Joseph to the death penalty in accordance with the law. This is proved by the fact that the brothers' names are engraved on the High Priest's breastplate,^{vii} which brings atonement for those who break the law, so surely they were holy and well-meaning individuals.

This all resolves the puzzle of why Joseph never sent word back to Jacob that he was alive, all the years that he was in Egypt. He feared that if his brothers found he was still alive, they would come to Egypt and complete the death penalty to which they had sentenced him.

Now, some feel that all this is a strained interpretation designed to spare the brothers' blushes. But in truth, when one looks carefully at all the relevant verses, it is impossible not to reach the same conclusion. The biblical text itself proves that the whole dispute revolved around the law of self-defence, and conscientious study will easily demonstrate this.

^{vii} Exodus 18:29

AFTERMATH

Midrash Tanchuma, Va-Yeshev 2

אמרו נחרים בינינו שלא יגיד אחד
ממנו ליעקב אבינו אמר להם יהודה
ראובן אינו כאן ואין החרם מתקיים
אלא בעשרה מה עשו שתפו
להקב"ה באותו החרם שלא יגיד
לאביהם כיון שירד ראובן בלילה
לאותו הבור להעלותו ולא מצאו ...
הגידו לו את המעשה ואת החרם
ושחק ואף הקב"ה ... לא הגיד מפני
החרם ... ולפיכך בא רעב בארץ
כנען שבע שנים וירדו אחי יוסף
עשרה לשבור בר ממצרים.

The brothers said: *"We will enact a vow of excommunication between us, that none of us will tell our father Jacob what we have done."* Judah said to them: *"Reuben is not here, and no writ is binding unless it is made by ten people."* What did they do? They swore God into the agreement that none of them should tell Jacob on pain of excommunication. Meanwhile, Reuben went down in the night to that pit, to bring Joseph out, but he could not find him. The brothers told him about their decision, about the writ, so he remained silent. And even the Holy One did not tell of this matter, on account of the writ. Therefore, the seven-year famine came to the land of Canaan, and the ten brothers of Joseph went down to obtain food from Egypt.

Notes...

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

Part 5: slave



THE NEW SLAVE

Genesis 39:1-13ⁱ

וְיוֹסֵף הוּרָד מִצְרֵימָה וַיְקַנְהוּ פוֹטִיפָר
סָרִיס פַּרְעֹה שֶׁר הַטְּבָחִים אִישׁ מִצְרֵי
מִיַּד הַיִּשְׁמַעֲלִים אֲשֶׁר הוּרְדוּ
שָׁמָּה: וַיְהִי יְהוָה אֶת יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי אִישׁ
מַצְלִיחַ וַיְהִי בְּבֵית אֲדֹנָיו הַמִּצְרִי:
וַיֵּרָא אֲדֹנָיו כִּי יְהוָה אִתּוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר
הוּא עֹשֶׂה יְהוָה מִצְלִיחַ בְּיָדוֹ: וַיִּמָּצָא
יוֹסֵף חֵן בְּעֵינָיו וַיִּשְׁרֹת אֹתוֹ וַיִּפְקְדֵהוּ
עַל בֵּיתוֹ וְכָל יֵשׁ לוֹ נָתַן בְּיָדוֹ: וַיְהִי
מֵאֲזֻל הַפְּקִיד אֹתוֹ בְּבֵיתוֹ וְעַל כָּל אֲשֶׁר
יֵשׁ לוֹ וַיִּבְרָךְ יְהוָה אֶת בֵּית הַמִּצְרִי
בְּגִלְלֵי יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי בִּרְבַּת יְהוָה בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר
יֵשׁ לוֹ בְּבֵית וּבְשָׂדֵה: וַיַּעֲזֹב כָּל אֲשֶׁר
לוֹ בְּיַד יוֹסֵף וְלֹא יָדַע אֹתוֹ מְאוּמָה כִּי
אִם הִלָּחֵם אֲשֶׁר הוּא אוֹכֵל וַיְהִי יוֹסֵף
יָפָה תָאֵר וַיְפָה מְרֹאָה: וַיְהִי אַחֵר
הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַתִּשָּׂא אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲדֹנָיו
אֶת עֵינֶיהָ אֶל יוֹסֵף וַתֹּאמֶר שְׂכַבָּה
עִמִּי: וַיִּמָּאֵן וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲדֹנָיו הֵן
אֲדֹנִי לֹא יָדַע אֹתִי מִה בְּבֵית וְכָל אֲשֶׁר
יֵשׁ לוֹ נָתַן בְּיָדִי: אֵינְנִי גְדוֹל בְּבֵית הַזֶּה
מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא חָשָׁה מִמֶּנִּי מְאוּמָה כִּי אִם
אוֹתָךְ בְּאֲשֶׁר אַתָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאִיךָ אֶעֱשֶׂה
הָרָעָה הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת וְחָטָאתִי
לֵאלֹהִים: וַיְהִי כַּדְּבָרָה אֶל יוֹסֵף יוֹם

When Joseph was taken down to Egypt, Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and his prefect – a type of Egyptian official – bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him there. The Eternal One was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he stayed in the house of his Egyptian master. And when his master saw that God was with him and that the Eternal lent success to everything he undertook, he took a liking to Joseph. He made him his personal attendant and put him in charge of his household, placing in his hands all that he owned. And from the time that the Egyptian put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Eternal One blessed his house for Joseph's sake, so that the blessing of God was upon everything that he owned, in the house and outside. He left all that he had in Joseph's hands and, with him there, he paid attention to nothing save the food that he ate.

Now Joseph was well built and handsome. After a time, his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph and said: "*Lie with me.*" But he refused. He said to his master's wife: "*Look, with me here, my master gives no thought to anything in this house, and all that he owns he has placed in my hands. He wields no more authority in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except yourself, since you are his wife. How then could I do this most wicked thing, and sin before God?*"

ⁱ NJPS translation.

יום ולא שמע אליה לשכב אצלה
להיות עמה: ויהי כהיום הזה ויבא
הביתה לעשות מלאכתו ואין איש
מאנשי הבית שם בבית: ותתפשטהו
בבגדו לאמר שכבה עמי ויעזב בגדו
בידה וינס ויצא החוצה: ויהי
כראותה כי עזב בגדו בידה וינס
החוצה:

b.Sotah 13b

ויקנהו פוטיפר סריס פרעה — אמר
רב: שקנאו לעצמו. בא גבריאלי
וסירסו ופירעו.

THE NEW MISTRESS

Midrash Tanchuma, Va-Yeshev 5

פעם אחת נתקבצו המצריות ובאו לראות
יופיו של יוסף, מה עשתה אשת פוטיפר
נטלה אתרוגים ונתנה לכל א' וא' מהן ונתנה
סכין לכל א' וא' ... כיון שהיו מסתכלו
ביופיו של יוסף היו חותכות את ידיהן,
אמרה להן ומה אתן בשעה אחת כך, אני
שבכל שעה רואה אותו עאכ"ו.

And much as she coaxed Joseph day after day, he did not yield to her request to lie beside her, to be with her.

One day, he came into the house to do his work. None of the household being there inside, she caught hold of him by his garment and said: “*Lie with me!*” But he left his garment in her hand and got away and fled outside.

Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh bought him. Rav explained that Potiphar bought Joseph for himself,ⁱⁱ until Gabriel came and castrated and mutilated him.ⁱⁱⁱ

One time, a number of Egyptian women banded together and went to leer at Joseph. What did Mrs Potiphar do? She took some etrogs, and gave one to each woman, along with a knife. When they saw Joseph's beauty, they all cut their hands. Mrs Potiphar said: “*If this happens to you when you see him once, imagine how worse it is for me when I see him the whole time!*”

ⁱⁱ Rashi *ad loc* clarifies that this was a sex thing.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Talmudic text is slightly corrupted but this is the gist of it.

The Koran^{iv}

Some women of the city said: “*The governor’s wife is trying to seduce her slave! Love for him consumes her heart! It is clear to us that she has gone astray.*” When she heard their malicious talk, she prepared a banquet and sent for them, giving each of them a knife. She said to Joseph: “*Come out and show yourself to them!*” – and when the women saw him, they were stunned by his beauty, and cut their hands, exclaiming: “*Great God! He cannot be mortal! He must be a precious angel!*” She said: “*This is the one you blamed me for.*”

Genesis Rabbah 85:2

א"ר יהושע בן לוי רואה היתה
באסטרולוגין שלה שהיא
עתידה להעמיד ממנו בן ולא
היתה יודעת אם ממנה אם
מבתה.

Rabbi Joshua ben-Levi taught: Mrs Potiphar learned from her astrologers that she was destined to bring a child into the world through Joseph. But she did not know whether this child would come from her or from her daughter Aseneth.

THAT DAY

b.Sotah 36b

ויהי כהיום הזה ויבא הביתה
לעשות מלאכתו ... רב ושמואל, חד
אמר: לעשות מלאכתו ממש, וחד
אמר: לעשות צרכיו נכנס ...
ותתפשהו בבגדו ... באתה דיוקנו
של אביו ונראתה לו בחלון, אמר לו:
יוסף! ... נעץ ידיו בקרקע ויצאה
שכבת זרעו מבין ציפורני ידיו.

One day, he came into the house to do his work. Rav and Shmu’el argued over what exactly this meant. One said Joseph went into the house, quite properly, to do his work. The other said that the phrase was a euphemism for sexual intent. *She caught hold of him by his garment.* A spectre of his father appeared to him in the window, saying to him: “*Joseph!*” So he dug his hands into the ground, and his semen spurted out from under his fingernails.

^{iv} Translated by M A S Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an: a new translation* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2004-05): sura 12 (ebook edition).

Professor James L Kugel^v

There was a certain tendency in rabbinic sources to fault Joseph on occasion. It was his tale-bearing that was responsible for his being sold as a slave down to Egypt, and it was his vanity, his dandy-like primping in Potiphar's house, that brought on the attentions of Mrs Potiphar and, ultimately, her wrongful accusation and his imprisonment. It therefore ought not to be terribly surprising to find that, with regard to the events of that day in particular, Joseph was likewise found by rabbinic sources to be something other than entirely innocent.

That such a reading enjoyed some popularity may be confirmed by a look at the 1st-century Aramaic translation of the Torah, known as Targum Onkelos. For while Onkelos usually translates narrative texts rather closely, here he has veered sharply from the Hebrew original: instead of *to do his work*, he has "*to check his account books*". One cannot but feel that this translator has gone out of his way to scotch what was already a very popular, but to his mind calumnious, reading of the phrase: instead of rendering it, and its vagaries, literally, he has substituted a more specific act that is safely beyond all possibility of double-entendre.

In view of all this, Joseph's behaviour takes on a somewhat different colouring: perhaps he knew perfectly well what he was doing when he approached the deserted house; perhaps he, no less than Mrs Potiphar, was intent on 'doing his work' there. It was not, according to the Babylonian Talmud, until after Mrs Potiphar *caught hold of him by his garment* that Joseph began to have second thoughts, thoughts that ultimately caused him to change his mind and flee. In that case, one must regard Joseph as, at least initially, a willing participant.

^v James L Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: the interpretive life of biblical texts* (San Fransisco: HarperCollins, 1990): 94-96.

Professor Samuel J Levine^{vi}

When Potiphar's wife looks at Joseph, she not only observes that he is a handsome young man. She also notices that he is engaged in childish, self-absorbed and dreamlike activities, signalling his inability to effectively navigate his surroundings, and his vulnerability to the attacks – or, in her case, the advances – of others, particularly adults in positions of authority. His behaviours label him as a child on the spectrum, innocent and naïve, rendering him attractive to her as a convenient target for her predatory appetites.

When Potiphar's wife first propositions him, Joseph refuses her advances. On one level, Joseph's determination to withstand her demands is a powerful act of defiance against his master's forceful wife. More significantly, his ability to exercise self-control is particularly notable in light of the impulsivity that he has repeatedly exhibited in the past.

Notwithstanding these indications of progress, however, Joseph remains unable fully to read Potiphar's wife's intentions and to anticipate and navigate her manipulations and manoeuvrings. In the course of his otherwise impressive speech to her, Joseph goes too far, invoking not only his loyalty to Potiphar but his fidelity to God as well. While the reference to Potiphar might resonate with his wife, it seems unlikely that she will be persuaded by Joseph's insistence that he not sin against God. If anything, mentioning his God will only serve as a reminder to Potiphar's wife that Joseph is a Hebrew, and indeed, she will later exploit his outsider status as part of her effort to incriminate him. Nevertheless, exhibiting another common characteristic of children on the spectrum, Joseph speaks to Potiphar's wife with the same zeal and enthusiasm he used in telling his brothers of his dreams. He is unable to stop himself from speaking the truth as he sees it, even if it will later be used against him. Potiphar's wife used her advanced social skills and emotional intelligence to outsmart Joseph, whose

^{vi} Samuel J Levine, *Was Yosef on the Spectrum? Understanding Joseph through Torah, midrash and classical Jewish sources* (Jerusalem: Urim, 2020): ch 5 (ebook edition).

moral strength and determination, along with his actual innocence, are woefully insufficient in the face of her manipulative exploitation.

Children on the spectrum are vulnerable to the false accusations of others, who are all too often willing and able to take advantage of an unpopular and socially inept outsider. In particular, both peers and adults may use a child on the spectrum as a scapegoat, who will be blamed for their own misdeeds.

Professor Rabbi Rachel Adelman^{vii}

Potiphar's wife is never named in the biblical passage, merely referred to as *wife of [Joseph's] master* or *his wife*. She is deemed an extension of her husband's property and is thus subservient to *the master*, just as Joseph is. Potiphar's wife is powerful in terms of class and ethnic status, although less so as a married woman, but she is dependent on male complicity in the transgressive sex act.

By way of the cantillation mark in the Hebrew text (a shalshet over the verb **וַיִּסָּר**, *he refused*), the Masoretes indicate how very super-human Joseph's resistance to her advances must have been.

The Talmud, meanwhile, expands upon the ethnic divide between the Egyptian woman and the Hebrew man, transforming the trial in the sexual arena into a contest of cultural values encoded in gender terms. All the servants have left for the idolatrous festivities, and Potiphar's wife has remained behind by design. Thus, the trial is set against a background where the battle for ethnic and religious difference is intertwined with the struggle over gender and sexual restraint.

^{vii} Professor Rabbi Rachel Adelman, "Potiphar and his wife desire Joseph", *TheTorah.com* (undated): <<https://www.thetorah.com/article/potiphar-and-his-wife-desire-joseph>>

Notes...

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

Part 6: prisoner



AFTERMATH

Genesis 39:14-23ⁱ

וּתְקַרָּא לְאִנְשֵׁי בֵיתָהּ וּתְאמַר לָהֶם לֵאמֹר
רְאוּ הֵבִיא לָנוּ אִישׁ עִבְרִי לְצַחֵק בְּנוּ בָּא
אֵלַי לְשֹׁכֵב עִמִּי וְאֶקְרָא בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל: וַיְהִי
כְשִׁמְעוּ בִּי הִרְיִמְתִּי קוֹלִי וְאֶקְרָא וַיַּעֲזֹב
בְּגָדוֹ אֶצְלִי וַיֵּנָס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה: וַתִּנַּח בְּגָדוֹ
אֶצְלָהּ עַד בּוֹא אֲדֹנָיו אֶל בֵּיתוֹ: וַתִּדְּבַר
אֵלָיו בְּדִבְרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֵאמֹר בָּא אֵלַי הָעֶבֶד
הָעִבְרִי אֲשֶׁר הֵבֵאתָ לָנוּ לְצַחֵק בִּי: וַיְהִי
כִּהְרִימִי קוֹלִי וְאֶקְרָא וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ אֶצְלִי
וַיֵּנָס הַחוּצָה: וַיְהִי כְשִׁמְעַתְּ אֲדֹנָיו אֶת דִּבְרֵי
אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרָה אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר בְּדִבְרִים
הָאֵלֶּה עָשָׂה לִי עֲבָדְךָ וַיַּחֲרֹ אִפּוֹ: וַיִּקַּח
אֲדֹנָי יוֹסֵף אֹתוֹ וַיִּתְּנֵהוּ אֶל בֵּית הַסֵּהֶר
מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֲסוּרֵי אֲסוּרֵי הִמְלִךְ אֲסוּרִים
וַיְהִי שָׁם בְּבֵית הַסֵּהֶר: וַיְהִי יְהוָה אִתּוֹ
יוֹסֵף וַיֵּט אֵלָיו חֶסֶד וַיִּתֵּן חֲנוּן בְּעֵינֵי שָׂר
בֵּית הַסֵּהֶר: וַיִּתֵּן שָׂר בֵּית הַסֵּהֶר בְּיַד יוֹסֵף
אֶת כָּל הָאֲסוּרִים אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵית הַסֵּהֶר וְאֵת
כָּל אֲשֶׁר עֹשִׂים שָׁם הוּא הָיָה עֹשֶׂה: אֵין
שָׂר בֵּית הַסֵּהֶר רָאָה אֶת כָּל מְאוּמָה בְּיָדוֹ
בְּאֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אִתּוֹ וְאֲשֶׁר הוּא עֹשֶׂה יְהוָה
מִצְלִיחַ:

Mrs Potiphar called out to her servants and said to them: “Look, he had to bring us a Hebrew to dally with us! This one came to lie with me; but I screamed loud. And when he heard me screaming at the top of my voice, he left his garment with me and got away and fled outside.” She kept his garment beside her, until his master came home. Then she told him the same story, saying: “The Hebrew slave whom you brought into our house came to me to dally with me; but when I screamed at the top of my voice, he left his garment with me and fled outside.” When his master heard the story that his wife told him, namely, “Thus and so your slave did to me,” he was furious. So Joseph’s master had him put in prison, where the king’s prisoners were confined.

But even while he was there in prison, the Eternal One was with Joseph, extending kindness to him and disposing the chief jailer favourably towards him. The chief jailer put in Joseph’s charge all the prisoners who were in that prison, and he was the one to carry out everything that was done there. The chief jailer did not supervise anything that was in Joseph’s charge, because God was with him, and whatever he did, the Eternal made successful.

ⁱ NJPS translation.

FORENSICS

Rosh to Genesis 47:22

כשנתפס יוסף בסיבת אשת אדוניו כאשר
אמרה לאנוס אותו באותו זמן היו
הכומרים שופטים ואמרו כך נראה
הקריעה אשר יש ליוסף ... אם הקריעה
לפניו הדין עמה ... ואם היא לאחוריו הדין
עמו שהוא ברח מפניה והחזיקה בבגדו
וקרעה אותו וימצא כן שמצאו הקריעה
לאחוריו.

Hadar Z'keinin ad loc

כשרצו להמליך יוסף אמרו המצרים
איך נמליך איש ששכב עם אשת
אדוניו. א"ל הכומרים ראו איפה
בגדו נקרע. אם נקרע מאחוריו בידוע
שלא רצה לבא עליה אלא כשברח
קרעתו אשת אדוניו כדי לעכבו ואם
נקרע לפניו דעו שרצה לבא עליה
והיא לא רצתה. בדקו ומצאו
הקריעה מלאחוריו כי גבריא'ל הפכה
והמליכוהו.

At the time that Joseph was detained on account of Mrs Potiphar's account of attempted rape, the priests acted as judges. They said: *"Let us examine the rip in the cloak Joseph was wearing. If it is on the front, Mrs Potiphar is telling the truth. And if it is on the back, Joseph is telling the truth: he fled from her, but she grabbed onto his cloak and tore it."* And the rip turned out to be on the back.

When the Egyptians were on the verge of appointing Joseph to high office, some of them said: *"How can we elevate a man who is suspected of sexual misconduct?"* But the priests said: *"Let us examine where his cloak is torn. If it is on the back, we will know that he did not want to lie with her, but instead Mrs Potiphar tore while trying to stop him fleeing from her. But if it is torn on the front, we will know that he sought to lie with her against her will."* They checked it and found that the rip was on the back... because the Angel Gabriel switched it. So Joseph was indeed appointed as vizier.

Riva ad loc

דאיכא מאן דאמר ... שרצה יוסף
לשכב עמה אלא שנראית לו
דמות דיוקנו של אביו.

The explanation where the Angel Gabriel switched the location of the rip is consistent with the Talmudic understandingⁱⁱ that Joseph was on the verge of lying with Mrs Potiphar until he saw a vision of his father.

Midrash Sechel Tov to Genesis 39:14, 20

ותקרא לאנשי ביתה — שנתנה
אותה בפה כי לא ראו הטיילו לובן
של ביצה תרנגולת על הדרגש,
ואמרה ראו שכבת זרעו מכח תאותו
לבוא עלי ... הביא כומרים ובדקו
הדבר, אמרו שימו גחלת של אש על
לובן זה אם מפעפע ונימוח, בידוע
שהוא שכבת זרע והוא חייב מיתה,
ואם היא נצלה בידוע שהוא לובן
של ביצה ופטור, בדקו אותו ומצאו
שהיא לובן ביצה ופטורוהו. אמר לו
אדוניו יודע אני בך שאין הדבר
ממך, אלא לוקחך אני מביתי, שלא
ליערב פסולת בבני: ויתנהו אל בית
הסוהר.

Mrs Potiphar called out to her servants. Not having seen what took place themselves, they took her word for it. They spread egg-white on her bed, then she said to her husband: “*Look! Semen! Proof of Joseph’s obsessive desire to lie with me!*”

Potiphar brought the priests, and they investigated, saying: “*Apply a burning coal to the white mark. If it bubbles and dissolves, we will know it is semen, and Joseph will be subject to the death penalty. But if it congeals, we will know that it is egg-white and he is innocent.*” They checked, and it turned out to be egg-white, so Joseph was exonerated.

His master said to him: “*I know you are innocent, but even so I must remove you from my household, so that nobody will question the lineage of my children.*” So he had Joseph put in prison.

ⁱⁱ b.Sotah 36b

Professor Judith R Baskinⁱⁱⁱ

The resemblance between egg white and semen was a motif in Middle Eastern folklore accounts of fabricated accusations of sexual impropriety. Moreover, in the surviving literary versions, this was not a ruse in which women were passive victims of male iniquity. In fact, with one exception, in the extant narratives it is always women who take the active role in perpetrating this deception, a telling indication of the negative ways in which women are often portrayed in Middle Eastern literary traditions.

CONJUGAL VISITS

Midrash Tanchuma, Va-Yeshev 9

כיון ששמע רבו כך רצה להרגו ...
אמרה לו אשתו אל תפסיד ממונך
הנח אותו בבית הסהר עד שתמכרהו
ותקח את ממונך, וכל זה לא עשתה
אלא שמא יתרצה בה, ובכל יום ויום
הולכת אצלו ואומרת לו התרצה לי
והוא אומר כבר נשבעתי, והיא
אומרת לו אני מעוורת עיניך והוא
אומר ה' פוקח עורים, כאן תהא
מיתתך בכבלים והוא אומר ה' מתיר
אסורים, אני מוכרת אותך בארץ
רחוקה הוא אומר ה' שומר את גרים.

When Joseph's master heard what had taken place, he wanted to kill Joseph. But Mrs Potiphar piped up: "*Do not make a loss on your purchase of a slave! Pop him in prions until you can sell him and recover your investment.*" She only did this because she still desired Joseph, and every day she went to visit him and implored him to desire her. But he would insist: "*No, I have sworn an oath.*" Then she would threaten him: "*I'll have you blinded!*" But he replied: "*God opens the eyes of the blind.*"^{iv} Then she said: "*I'll have you put in chains until the day you die!*" But he replied: "*God releases the captive.*"^v Then she said: "*I'll have you sold into some far-off land!*" But he replied: "*God guards the stranger.*"^{vi}

ⁱⁱⁱ Judith R Baskin, "Rabbinic Forensics: Distinguishing Egg White from Semen in b. Giṭṭin 57a", in Meron M Piotrkowski, Geoffrey Herman and Saskia Dönitz (eds), *Sources and Interpretation in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 252-266: 266.

^{iv} Psalm 146:8

^v Psalm 146:8

^{vi} Psalm 146:8

RELEASE

Genesis Rabbah 88:1

כתוב ... ותקרא לאנשי ביתה וגו', נתנה אותו בפיהם של כולם, אמר הקב"ה מוטב שיפנו אלו באלו ואל יפנו לצדיק הזה, הה"ד ויהי אחר הדברים האלה חטאו וגו'.

It is written: *Mrs Potiphar called out to her servants (Genesis 39:14)*. In other words, she made sure that everybody heard about her allegations against Joseph. The Holy One said: *"It would be better if the Egyptians gossip about each other than about a righteous man like Joseph."* Thus it is written: *After these matters, the cupbearer and the baker sinned (Genesis 40:1)*.

Genesis 41:8-14^{vii}

וַיְהִי בִבְקֹר וּתְפֹעֶם רוּחוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיִּקְרָא
אֶת כָּל חֲרָטְמֵי מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת כָּל חֲכָמֶיהָ
וַיְסַפֵּר פִּרְעֹה לָהֶם אֶת חֲלָמוֹ וְאֵין פֹּתֵר
אוֹתָם לִפְרֹעֶה: וַיַּדְבֵּר שֵׁר הַמַּשְׁקִים אֶת
פִּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר אֶת חֲטָאֵי אֲנִי מִזְכִּיר הַיּוֹם:
פִּרְעֹה קָצַף עַל עַבְדָּיו וַיִּתֵּן אֹתִי בַּמִּשְׁמֶר
בֵּית שֵׁר הַטִּבְחִים אֹתִי וְאֶת שֵׁר הָאֲפִים:
וַנְּחַלְמָה חֲלוֹם בְּלִילָה אֶחָד אֲנִי וְהוּא
אִישׁ כְּפִתְרוֹן חֲלָמוֹ חֲלָמְנוּ: וְשָׁם אָתְנוּ
נָעַר עַבְדִּי עֶבֶד לְשֵׁר הַטִּבְחִים וְנִסְפָּר לוֹ
וַיִּפְתֹּר לָנוּ אֶת חֲלָמֵינוּ אִישׁ בְּחֲלָמוֹ
פָּתַר: וַיְהִי כִּאֲשֶׁר פָּתַר לָנוּ בֵּן הָיָה ...:
וַיִּשְׁלַח פִּרְעֹה וַיִּקְרָא אֶת יוֹסֵף וַיְרִיצֵהוּ
מִן הַבּוֹר וַיַּגְלֵחַ וַיַּחְלֵף שְׂמֹלֶתוֹ וַיָּבֵא אֶל
פִּרְעֹה:

The morning after his dreams, Pharaoh's spirit was agitated, and he sent for all the magician-priests of Egypt, and all its sages; and Pharaoh told them his dreams, but none could interpret them for Pharaoh. The chief cupbearer then spoke up and said to Pharaoh: *"I must make mention today of my offenses. Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and placed me in custody in the house of the prefect, together with the chief baker. We had dreams the same night, he and I, each of us a dream with a meaning of its own. A Hebrew youth was there with us, a servant of the prefect; and when we told him our dreams, he interpreted them for us, telling each of the meaning of his dream. And as he interpreted for us, so it came to pass."* Thereupon Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was rushed from the dungeon. He had his hair cut and changed his clothes, and he appeared before Pharaoh.

^{vii} NJPS translation.

Notes...

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

Part 7: vizier



THE STORY SO FAR

Donald A Seyboldⁱ

JOSEPH'S MASTER	JOSEPH'S SUBJECTS	TRANSITIONAL CLOTHING	PLACE OF AMBIGUITY
Jacob	Joseph's brothers	-	-
-	-	The dreamcoat	Pit
Potiphar	Potiphar's servants	-	-
-	-	The torn cloak	Jail
Prison governor	The prisoners	-	-
-	-	The new shirt	Egypt
Pharaoh	The Egyptians	-	-

ⁱ Donald A Seybold, "Paradox and symmetry in the Joseph narrative", in Kenneth R R Gros Louis (ed), *Literary Interpretation of Biblical Narratives* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 59-73: 68.

PROMOTION

Genesis 41:38-44ⁱⁱ

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל עֲבָדָיו הֲנִמְצָא
כָּזֶה אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ:
וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל יוֹסֵף אַחֲרָי
הוֹדִיעַ אֱלֹהִים אוֹתָהּ אֵת כָּל זֹאת
אֵין נָבוֹן וְחָכָם כָּמוֹהָ: אֶתָּה תִּהְיֶה
עַל בֵּיתִי וְעַל פִּיךָ יִשָּׁק כָּל עַמִּי רַק
הַכֹּסֵא אֶגְדֹּל מִמֶּה: וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה
אֶל יוֹסֵף רְאֵה נִתְּתִי אֹתְךָ עַל כָּל
אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: וַיָּסֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶת
טַבַּעְתּוֹ מֵעַל יָדוֹ וַיִּתֵּן אוֹתָהּ עַל יַד
יוֹסֵף וַיַּלְבֵּשׁ אוֹתוֹ בְּגָדֵי שֵׁשׁ וַיָּשֶׂם
רֶבֶד הַזָּהָב עַל צַוְאָרוֹ: וַיִּרְכַּב אוֹתוֹ
בְּמֶרְכָּבַת הַמִּשְׁנָה אֲשֶׁר לוֹ וַיִּקְרְאוּ
לִפְנָיו אַבְרָהָ וְנַחֲשׁוֹן אוֹתוֹ עַל כָּל
אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל
יוֹסֵף אֲנִי פַרְעֹה וּבִלְעָדִיךָ לֹא
יָרִים אִישׁ אֶת יָדוֹ וְאֶת רַגְלוֹ בְּכָל
אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

And Pharaoh said to his courtiers: “Could we find another like him – a man with the Divine spirit?”

So Pharaoh said to Joseph: “Since God has made all this known to you, there is none so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my court, and by your command shall all my people be directed; only with respect to the throne shall I be superior to you.” Pharaoh further said to Joseph: “See, I put you in charge of all the land of Egypt.”

And removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph’s hand; and he had him dressed in robes of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck. He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command, and they cried before him, “Bow the knee!” Thus he placed him over all the land of Egypt.

Pharaoh said to Joseph: “I am Pharaoh; yet without you, no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.”

ⁱⁱ NJPS translation

Genesis Rabbah 90:3

א"ר שמעון בן גמליאל יוסף משלו
נתנו לו ... גופו שלא נגע בעבירה,
וילבש אותו בגדי שש, צוארו שלא
הרכין לעבירה, וישם רביד הזהב
על צוארו, ידיו שלא משמשו
בעבירה, ויסר המלך את טבעתו
מעל ידו ויתן אותה על יד יוסף,
רגליו שלא פסעו בעבירה ... וירכב
אותו במרכבת המשנה אשר לו.

Sefer ha-Yasharⁱⁱⁱ

ויוסף בן שלושים שנה בעמדו לפני
פרעה, ויצא יוסף מלפני המלך ויהי
למשנה המלך במצרים. ויתן המלך
ליוסף מאה עבדים לשרתו בביתו, וגם
יוסף שלח וקנה עבדים רבים ויהיו בבית
יוסף. אז בנה לו יוסף בית גדול מאוד
בבתי המלכים, לפני חצר בית המלך.
ויעש בבית היכל גדול נחמד למראה
מאוד וטוב למושב, שלוש שנים עשה
יוסף את כל ביתו. ויעש לו יוסף כיסא
נחמד מאוד מזהב וכסף לרוב, וירצפֿהו
באבני שוהם ובדולח. ויעש בו תבנית כל
ארץ מצרים, ותבנית יאור מצרים
ומשקה את כל ארץ מצרים. וישב יוסף

Rabbi Shimon ben-Gamliel said: Joseph got everything that he deserved. His body that did not touch in transgression – *Pharaoh dressed him in linen garments (Genesis 41:42)*. His neck that he did not bend for transgression – *Pharaoh placed a gold chain on his neck (Genesis 41:42)*. His hands that did not grope in transgression – *Pharaoh removed his signet ring from upon his hand, and he placed it upon Joseph's hand (Genesis 41:42)*. His feet that did not stride in transgression ... *Pharaoh had him ride in the alternate chariot that he had (Genesis 41:43)*.

And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, and Joseph went out from the presence of the king and he was second of the king in Egypt. And the king gave Joseph 100 servants to wait on him in his house, and Joseph went and purchased many more servants to work in his house. Then he built himself a grand palace like the palace of a king, opposite Pharaoh's residence. And in that house he made a large temple, very fine in appearance and very luxurious to dwell in. Joseph spent three years preparing these things. And he made himself a very costly throne of solid gold and silver, decked with onyx stones and bdellium, and he engraved upon it a map of the whole land of Egypt, including the river of Egypt, which supplied all the land with water. Joseph dwelt securely in his house, upon the throne that he made for himself, and the Eternal

ⁱⁱⁱ Machon ha-K'tav edition (1987): 164. Translation adapted from Edward B M Browne, *The Book Jashar: the lost book of the Bible* (New York: United States Publishing Company, 1876): 265-266.

לבטח בביתו על כסאו אשר עשה לו,
ליוסף ה' ליוסף חכמה על חכמתו. וכל
יושבי מצרים ועבדי פרעה ושריו אהבו
את יוסף מאוד, כי מאת ה' היה הדבר
הזה ליוסף. ויהי ה' את יוסף ויגדל מאוד
הולך וגדל, ויהי שומעו בכל הארץ.

One increased the wisdom of Joseph yet further. And all the inhabitants of Egypt, the servants of Pharaoh, as well as the princes, loved Joseph exceedingly, for this was destined by God concerning Joseph. The Holy One was with Joseph, and he increased continually in greatness, and his fame spread throughout the earth.

THROWING PANTS AT ELVIS

Genesis Rabbah 98:18

בשעה שיצא יוסף למלוך על מצרים היו
בנות מלכים מציצות עליו דרך החרכין
והיו משליכות עליו שירין וקטלין ונזמים
וטבעות כדי שיתלה עיניו ויביט בהן
אעפ"כ לא היה מביט בהן.

Whenever Joseph went out on official business, the daughters of the Egyptian elite would peer out of their windows and cast upon him bracelets, pendants, nose rings and other jewellery so that he would lift his eyes and look at them. Nevertheless, he did not look at them.

Judith S Antonelli^{iv}

It was not simply Joseph's good looks that made women climb the walls to see him. He was the (phallic) fertility god who had come to save their lives, and they welcomed him as such. They welcomed their new god's father, too. This is why Jacob did not want to be buried in Egypt – so that the Egyptians should not make a god of him.^v

^{iv} Judith S Antonelli, *In the Image of God: a feminist commentary on the Torah* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1995): 130.

^v Cited to Zohar 1:222a

SLAVE AGAIN?

b.Horayot 10a-b

כמדומין אתם ששררה אני נותן לכם? עבדות אני
נותן לכם.

Do you imagine that I am giving you power? I am making you
a servant!

Dr Dvora E Weisberg^{vi}

We finally reach a moment in which Joseph is able to integrate his two selves, the Hebrew shepherd and the powerful vizier. His dreams of grandeur now make sense to him, as he recognises that power can be used to serve his brothers rather than to subjugate them.

^{vi} Dr Dvora E Weisberg, “The Joseph story, part II: fantasy, Jewish style – davar acher”, Union of Reform Judaism (December 2008): <<https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/joseph-story-part-ii-fantasy-jewish-style>>

Notes...

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

Part 8: minister for food



ENDING HUNGER

Genesis 41:47-49, 53-57, 47:15-21ⁱ

וּמַעַשׂ הָאָרֶץ בְּשִׁבְעַת שָׁנֵי הַשָּׁבַע
לְקִמְצִים: וַיִּקְבֹּץ אֶת כָּל אֹכֶל שָׁבַע
שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּתֵּן
אֹכֶל בְּעָרִים אֹכֶל שָׂדֵה הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר
סְבִיבֹתֶיהָ נָתַן בְּחוֹכֶה: וַיַּצְבֹּר יוֹסֵף
בָּר כַּחֹל הַיָּם הָרַבָּה מְאֹד עַד כִּי
חָדַל לִסְפֹּר כִּי אֵין מִסְפָּר: ...
וַתְּכַלֶּינָה שְׁבַע שָׁנֵי הַשָּׁבַע אֲשֶׁר
הָיָה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: וַתַּחלֶּינָה שְׁבַע
שָׁנֵי הָרָעָב לָבוֹא בְּאֶשֶׁר אָמַר יוֹסֵף
וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּכָל הָאֲרָצוֹת וּבְכָל אֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם הָיָה לֶחֶם: וַתִּרְעַב כָּל אֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם וַיִּצְעַק הָעָם אֶל פַּרְעֹה
לֶלֶחֶם וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה לְכָל מִצְרַיִם
לָבוֹ אֶל יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר לָכֶם
תַּעֲשׂוּ: וְהָרָעָב הָיָה עַל כָּל פְּנֵי
הָאָרֶץ וַיִּפְתַּח יוֹסֵף אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר
בָּהֶם וַיִּשְׁבֹּר לְמִצְרַיִם וַיַּחֲזֹק הָרָעָב
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: וְכָל הָאָרֶץ בָּאוּ
מִצְרַיִמָּה לִשְׁבֹּר אֶל יוֹסֵף כִּי חָזַק
הָרָעָב בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ: ... וַיִּתֵּם הַבֶּסֶף
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּמֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ
כָּל מִצְרַיִם אֶל יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר הִבָּה לָנוּ
לֶחֶם וְלָמָּה נָמוּת נְגִידָה כִּי אֲפִס
בֶּסֶף: וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף הִבּוּ מִקְנֵיכֶם

During the seven years of plenty, the land produced in abundance. And Joseph gathered all the grain of the seven years that the land of Egypt was enjoying, and stored the grain in the cities; he put in each city the grain of the fields around it. So Joseph collected produce in very large quantity, like the sands of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured.

The seven years of abundance that the land of Egypt enjoyed came to an end, and the seven years of famine set in, just as Joseph had foretold. There was famine in all lands, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread.

And when all the land of Egypt felt the hunger, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians: *“Go to Joseph; whatever he tells you, you shall do.”* Accordingly, when the famine became severe in the land of Egypt, Joseph laid open all that was within, and rationed out grain to the Egyptians.

The famine, however, spread over the whole world. So all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to procure rations, for the famine had become severe throughout the world.

And when the money gave out in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said: *“Give us bread, lest we*

ⁱ NJPS translation

וְאֶתְנָהּ לָכֶם בְּמִקְנֵיכֶם אִם אָפֶס
 בָּסָף: וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת מִקְנֵיהֶם אֶל יוֹסֵף
 וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם יוֹסֵף לֶחֶם בְּסוּסִים
 וּבְמִקְנֵה הַצֹּאן וּבְמִקְנֵה הַבָּקָר
 וּבְחֻמְרִים וַיִּנְהֵלֵם בְּלֶחֶם בְּכָל
 מִקְנֵהֶם בַּשָּׁנָה הַהוּא: וַתָּמָס הַשָּׁנָה
 הַהוּא וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵלָיו בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִית
 וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ לֹא נִבְחַד מֵאֲדֹנֵי כִי אִם
 תָּם הַכֶּסֶף וּמִקְנֵה הַבְּהֵמָה אֶל אֲדֹנֵי
 לֹא נִשְׁאַר לִפְנֵי אֲדֹנֵי בְלֹתֵי אִם
 גּוֹיְתֵנוּ וְאֲדָמָתֵנו: לָמָּה נָמוּת
 לְעֵינֶיךָ גַּם אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם אֲדָמָתֵנו קְנֵה
 אֶתָּנוּ וְאֶת אֲדָמָתֵנו בְּלֶחֶם וְנִחְיֶה
 אֲנַחְנוּ וְאֲדָמָתֵנו עֲבָדִים לַפֶּרֶעַה
 וְתֵן זֶרַע וְנִחְיֶה וְלֹא נָמוּת וְהִיא אֲדָמָה
 לֹא תִשָּׁם: וַיִּקֶּן יוֹסֵף אֶת כָּל אֲדָמַת
 מִצְרַיִם לַפֶּרֶעַה כִּי מָכְרוּ מִצְרַיִם
 אִישׁ שָׂדֵהוּ כִּי חֹזֵק עָלֵהֶם הָרָעָב
 וַתְּהִי הָאָרֶץ לַפֶּרֶעַה: וְאֵת הָעָם
 הָעֶבְרִי אֹתוֹ לְעָרִים מִקְצֵה גִבּוֹל
 מִצְרַיִם וְעַד קֶצֶהוּ:

die before your very eyes; for the money is gone!” And Joseph said: “Bring your livestock, and I will sell to you against your livestock, if the money is gone.” So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for the horses, for the stocks of sheep and cattle, and the asses; thus he provided them with bread that year in exchange for all their livestock.

And when that year was ended, they came to him the next year and said to him: “We cannot hide from my lord that, with all the money and animal stocks consigned to my lord, nothing is left at my lord’s disposal save our persons and our farmland. Let us not perish before your eyes, both we and our land. Take us and our land in exchange for bread, and we with our land will be serfs to Pharaoh; provide the seed, that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become a waste.”

So Joseph gained possession of all the farm land of Egypt for Pharaoh, all the Egyptians having sold their fields because the famine was too much for them; thus the land passed over to Pharaoh. And Joseph removed the population town by town, from one end of Egypt’s border to the other.

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court

For the purpose of this Statute, ‘crime against humanity’ means any of the following acts when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack: (a) murder; (b) extermination; (c) enslavement; (d) deportation or forcible transfer of population; ... (k) other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health.

Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commissionⁱⁱ

In merely a few years during the 1970s, perpetrators of the Cambodian Genocide murdered up to 3 million of their fellow countrymen and caused unimaginable suffering to a great number of others. Members of the Khmer Rouge, the radical political regime behind the terror, invoked a dubious justification of their crimes by alleging that such actions would ultimately improve everyday people’s quality of life through the establishment of a more egalitarian society under communist rule. With the country weakened by American intervention, Cambodia descended into chaos. The Khmer Rouge seized the opportunity to assume power by storming the city of Phnom Penh in April of 1975. Rule under the Khmer Rouge immediately and intentionally transformed Cambodian life, declaring a ‘Year Zero’ from which point life must completely change. Pol Pot, former schoolteacher and now dictator, put forth genocidal policies that relocated, enslaved, tortured, and murdered enormous numbers of Cambodians. Once in control, the Khmer Rouge evacuated the city of Phnom Penh, moving three million civilians to the nation’s rural fields. The people were made to work long hours of backbreaking slave labour and received little, if anything, to eat. Malnutrition and medical neglect were rampant. When their labour fell short of production goals, men, women, and children were beaten.

ⁱⁱ Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commission, “Genocide in Cambodia” (undated): <<https://thgca.texas.gov/learning/overviews-of-the-holocaust-and-genocides/cambodia>>

Rashi to Genesis 47:21

ואת העם העביר — יוסף מעיר לעיר, לזכרון שאין להם עוד חלק בארץ ... ולא הוצרך הכתוב לכתוב זאת, אלא להודיע שבחו של יוסף שנתכוין להסיר חרפה מעל אחיו, שלא יהיו קורין אותם גולים:

Kli Yakar to Genesis 47:21

ואת העם העביר לערים — פירש רש"י להסיר חרפה מעל אחיו שלא יאמרו גולים המה. ורחוק הוא שבעבור תועלת קטן זה יבלבל יוסף כל הארץ ... ויותר נכון לפרש כל הבלבול הלזה לפי שנאמר ואהבתם את הגר כי גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים, כי כל מי שלא היה גר מימיו אינו מרגיש בצערו של הגר ואינו חס על נפש הגר, אבל מי שהיה בעצמו גר יודע בצערו של הגר וכל דעליה סני לחבריה לא יעבד, על כן העביר יוסף העם לערים כדי ... כדי שירגישו בצערו של הגר ... דבר אחר, לכך העביר אותם יוסף לערים כי ראה שיעקב ובניו נתישבו בארץ ... ויש לחוש כי ברוב הימים יקום מלך עריץ וידרוש מעל ספר דברי הימים של

And Joseph removed the population. That is, he moved the population of one city to another city, and vice versa, in order to remind the Egyptians that they had no ownership rights over any land anywhere. And this is to Joseph's credit: he was trying to relieve his brothers, once they joined him in Egypt, from the ignominy of being landless wanderers.

And Joseph removed the population from their cities. Rashi suggests that this was in order to spare his brothers the ignominy of being labelled exiles. But far be it from Joseph to up-end the whole country just to reap this small benefit.

Rather, we should understand Joseph's disruptive actions through the prism of the commandment *You must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Deuteronomy 10:19)*. For anyone who has not personally experienced what it is to be a displaced minority in their own lifetime is not able to know the torment of the stranger, and will not be sympathetic to their plight.

But one who has been a stranger themselves knows their torment. Anyone who harbours hatred for their fellow human beings has never been a slave! Thus, Joseph evacuated the entire population from their cities in order that they should gain insight into what it is to be a displaced minority.

כל עיר ויושביה אשר עליו כתוב
זכרון כל קרקע של מי היא, ולא
ימצא לישראל שום זכות שהיה
לאבותם בנחלאות ואין אחד מהם
יכול לטעון קרקע זו של אבותי
היתה ויגרשום ממנה, על כן
העביר כולם לערים עד ששום
אחד מהם לא ישב על אחוזת
אבותיו ויהיו ישראל כאחד מהם.

Chizkuni to Genesis 47:21

ואת העם העביר אתו לערים —
שלא יאחזו עוד בקרקע לפי שקנה
אדמתם, או שמא לאחר זמן יחזור כל
איש בקרקע שלו לומר זו ירושתי
מאבותי ולפיכך העבירם [ש...] כל
אחד ואחד גר בשל עמיתו.

Rashbam to Genesis 47:21

העביר אותם לערים — כמו
שעשה סנחריב בדכתי' אל ארץ
בארצכם, כדי שלא יטענו כח
חזקה איש איש בארצו לאחר
מבירה:

Another possibility: Joseph removed the population from their cities because he predicted that his family would eventually come to live in Egypt, and he feared that one day a tyrannical ruler would consult the archives of land ownership and discover from these registers that neither the Israelites nor their ancestors had any right whatsoever to be there. Therefore he displaced everybody from their towns so that everybody would be living on someone else's land, and the Israelites would be indistinguishable from the general population in this regard.

And Joseph removed the population from their cities. He did this in order that they would no longer feel any attachment to what had formerly been their own land, lest, after the crisis, they returned to it and said: *"I inherited this from my ancestors."* Therefore, Joseph displaced them in order that everybody would be living on somebody else's land.

And Joseph removed the population from their cities. He acted like Sennacherib, who enticed the Israelites away from their land.ⁱⁱⁱ Joseph's intention was that nobody would be able, later, to assert any form of possession or ownership over any land.

ⁱⁱⁱ 2 Kings 18

CONSEQUENCES

Rabbi Sylvia Rothschild^{iv}

Joseph undermines the relationship set at the beginning of the book of Genesis, where people are created to serve and to guard the land, and instead of being the stewards of nature, the people become the servants of the ruling power. This story shows us how slavery becomes normalised, even welcomed as a way to stay fed and alive. Even if the people themselves suggest selling themselves once they have no more money or other assets, Joseph's act of population transfer hardens and fixes the reality of the rupture in the relationship between each family and their land. The move away from one's land and from country to cities loosens the bonds of community, changing relationships further. Everyone becomes a little more vulnerable and a little more alone. The political class concentrates power in its own hands, the population are less able to resist.

So, when the Book of Exodus opens some 450 or so years later, and the memory of Joseph and his part in cementing the ruling powers is forgotten, we find that slavery is an obvious option for the Egyptians to use against the non-Egyptian people living among them. The powerful are able to manipulate the ordinary citizens, and the stage is set for further misery.

^{iv} Rabbi Sylvia Rothschild, "Va-Yiggash: when our relationships with land and with each other are damaged, we have to look at our own role before we can heal the breach" (1 January 2020): <<https://rabbisylviarothschild.com/2020/01/01/vayigash-when-our-relationships-with-land-and-with-each-other-are-damaged-we-have-to-look-at-our-own-role-before-we-can-heal-the-breach/>>

Sefer ha-Yashar^v

ויחלו כל מצרים לענות את בני יעקב
ולמרר את חייהם ... ויסירו מידם את כל
הכרמים והשדות אשר נתן להם יוסף,
ואת כל הבתים הטובות אשר היו בני
ישראל בהם ... החלו כל מצרים ...
לענותם בכל עבודה קשה.

All the Egyptians began to afflict the Israelites. They embittered their lives. And they seized from the Israelites all the vineyards and fields which Joseph had given them, and all their houses, and all the good things that the Israelites owned. And all the Egyptians began to afflict them with hard forced labour.

^v Machon ha-K'tav edition (1987): 202.

Notes...

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

Part 9: reunion



THE NARRATIVE

Genesis 42:1-44:17, 33-45:16ⁱ

וַיֵּרָא יַעֲקֹב כִּי יֵשׁ שָׂבֵר
בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב
לְבָנָיו לָמָּה תִּתְרָאוּ:
וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה שָׁמַעְתִּי כִּי
יֵשׁ שָׂבֵר בְּמִצְרַיִם רְדּוּ
שָׁמָּה וּשְׁבֵרוּ לָנוּ מִשָּׁם
וְנִחְיָה וְלֹא נָמוּת: וַיֵּרְדּוּ
אָחִי יוֹסֵף עֶשְׂרֵה לְשָׁבֵר
בָּר מִמִּצְרַיִם: וְאֶת בְּנֵימִין
אָחִי יוֹסֵף לֹא שָׁלַח יַעֲקֹב
אֶת אָחִיו כִּי אָמַר פֶּן
יִקְרָאנוּ אֶסּוֹן: וַיָּבֹאוּ בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל לְשָׁבֵר בְּתוֹךְ
הַבָּאִים כִּי הָיָה הָרָעָב
בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: וַיּוֹסֶף הוּא
הַשְּׁלִיט עַל הָאֶרֶץ הוּא
הַמְּשַׁבֵּיר לְכָל עַם הָאֶרֶץ
וַיָּבֹאוּ אָחִי יוֹסֵף וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
לּוֹ אִפְּסִים אֲרָצָה: וַיֵּרָא
יוֹסֵף אֶת אָחִיו וַיִּכְרַם
וַיִּתְּנָבֵר אֲלֵיהֶם וַיַּדְבֵּר
אִתָּם קָשׁוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם
מֵאֵין בָּאתֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ
מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן לְשָׁבֵר אֶכֶל:
וַיַּכֵּר יוֹסֵף אֶת אָחִיו וְהֵם

Jacob saw that there were rations in Egypt,
so Jacob said to his sons:

“Why do you keep looking at one another?”

And he said:

*“Here, I have heard that there are rations in Egypt;
go down there and buy us rations from there,
that we may live and not die.”*

So Joseph’s brothers went down, ten of them,
to buy some rationed grain from Egypt.

But Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, Jacob would not send with his brothers,
for he said: *“Lest harm befall him!”*

The sons of Jacob came to buy-rations among those that came,
for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

Now Joseph was the governor over the land; it was he who supplied rations to
all the people of the land.

And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed low to him, nostrils to the earth.

When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognised them,
but he pretended-no-recognition of them and spoke roughly with them.

He said to them:

“From where do you come?”

They said: *“From the land of Canaan, to buy food-rations.”*

ⁱ Based on Fox translation

לא הכירו: ויזכר יוסף
 את החלמות אשר חלם
 להם ויאמר אליהם
 מרגלים אתם לראות את
 ערות הארץ באתם:
 ויאמרו אליו לא אדני
 ועבדיה באו לשבר אכל:
 בלנו בני איש אחד נחנו
 בנים אנחנו לא היו
 עבדיה מרגלים: ויאמר
 אליהם לא כי ערות הארץ
 באתם לראות: ויאמרו
 שנים עשר עבדיה אחים
 אנחנו בני איש אחד
 בארץ כנען והנה הקטן
 את אבינו היום והאחד
 איננו: ויאמר אליהם
 יוסף הוא אשר דברתי
 אליכם לאמר מרגלים
 אתם: בזאת תבחנו חי
 פרעה אם תצאו מזה כי
 אם בבוא אחיכם הקטן
 הנה: שלחו מכם אחד
 ויקח את אחיכם ואתם
 האסרו ויבחנו דבריכם
 האמת אתכם ואם לא חי
 פרעה כי מרגלים אתם:
 ויאסר אתם אל משמר
 שלשת ימים: ויאמר

Now Joseph recognised his brothers, but for their part, they did not recognise him.

And Joseph was reminded of the dreams that he had dreamt of them.

He said to them:

"You are spies!

It is to see the nakedness of the land that you have come!"

They said to him: "No, my lord!

Rather, your servants have come to buy food-rations.

We are all of us the sons of one man,

we are honest,

your servants have never been spies!"

But he said to them:

"No!

For it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see!"

They said:

"Your servants are twelve,

we are brothers,

sons of one man in the land of Canaan:

the youngest is with our father now,

and one is no more."

Joseph said to them:

"It is just as I spoke to you, saying: 'You are spies!'

Hereby shall you be tested:

As Pharaoh lives!

You shall not depart from this place

אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף בְּיוֹם
 הַשְּׁלִישִׁי זֹאת עָשׂוּ וְחִיו
 אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים אֲנִי יָרֵא:
 אִם בָּנִים אַתֶּם אַחֲיֵכֶם
 אֶחָד יֵאָסֵר בְּבֵית
 מִשְׁמָרְכֶם וְאַתֶּם לָכוּ
 הִבִּיאוּ שָׂבֵר רַעְבוֹן
 בְּתִיכֶם: וְאֵת אַחֲיֵכֶם
 הִקְטַן תְּבִיאוּ אֵלַי וְיִאָמְנוּ
 דְּבָרֵיכֶם וְלֹא תָמוּתוּ
 וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן: וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ
 אֶל אָחִיו אֲבָל אֲשָׁמִים
 אֲנַחְנוּ עַל אָחִינוּ אֲשֶׁר
 רָאִינוּ צָרַת נַפְשׁוֹ
 בְּהַתְּחַנְנוֹ אֵלֵינוּ וְלֹא
 שָׁמַעְנוּ עַל כֵּן בָּאָה אֵלֵינוּ
 הַצָּרָה הַזֹּאת: וַיַּעַן רְאוּבֵן
 אֲתֶם לֹא אָמַרְתֶּם הֲלוֹא אָמַרְתִּי
 אֲלֵיכֶם לֵאמֹר אֵל תִּחָּטְאוּ
 בְּיָלֵד וְלֹא שָׁמַעְתֶּם וְגַם
 דָּמוֹ הִנֵּה נִדְרָשׁ: וְהֵם לֹא
 יָדְעוּ כִּי שָׁמַעַ יוֹסֵף כִּי
 הִמְלִיץ בֵּינְתֶם: וַיֹּסֵב
 מֵעֲלִיהֶם וַיִּבֶךְ וַיֵּשֶׁב
 אֲלֵהֶם וַיְדַבֵּר אֲלֵהֶם וַיִּקַּח
 מֵאֲתָם אֶת שְׁמֹעוֹן וַיֹּאסֶר
 אוֹתוֹ לְעֵינֵיהֶם: וַיֵּצֵא יוֹסֵף
 וַיְמַלְאוּ אֶת כְּלֵיהֶם בָּר
 וַלְהָשִׁיב בְּסִפְיָהֶם אִישׁ

unless your youngest brother comes here!
Send one of you to fetch your brother,
while the rest of you remain as prisoners.
Thus will your words be tested, whether there is truth in you or not –
as Pharaoh lives, indeed, you are spies!”
 He removed them into custody for three days.
 Joseph said to them on the third day:
“Do this, and stay alive,
for I hold God in awe:
if you are honest,
let one of your brothers be held prisoner in the house of your custody,
and as for you, go, bring back rations for the famine-supply of your households.
Then bring your youngest brother back to me,
so that your words will be proven truthful, and you will not die.”
 They prepared to do so.
 But they said, each one to his brother:
“Truly,
we are guilty:
concerning our brother!
We saw his heart’s distress
when he pleaded with us,
and we did not listen.
Therefore this distress has come upon us!”
 Reuben answered them, saying:
“Did I not say to you, say: ‘Do not sin against the child!’

אֶל שָׁקוֹ וּלְתַת לָהֶם צֶדֶה
 לְדֶרֶךְ וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בֶּן:
 וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת שִׁבְרָם עַל
 חֲמֹרֵיהֶם וַיֵּלְכוּ מִשָּׁם:
 וַיִּפְתַּח הָאֶחָד אֶת שָׁקוֹ
 לְתַת מִסְפּוֹא לְחֹמְרוֹ
 בְּמִלּוֹן וַיֵּרָא אֶת בִּסְפוֹ
 וְהִנֵּה הוּא בְּפִי אֲמַתְחָתוֹ:
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל אָחִיו הַיּוֹשֵׁב
 בִּסְפִי וְגַם הִנֵּה בְּאֲמַתְחָתִי
 וַיֵּצֵא לָבָם וַיִּחְרְדוּ אִישׁ
 אֶל אָחִיו לֵאמֹר מַה זֹּאת
 עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים לָנוּ: וַיָּבֹאוּ
 אֶל יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם אֶרְצָה
 בְּנֵעַן וַיִּגִּידוּ לוֹ אֵת כָּל
 הַקֶּרֶת אֲתָם לֵאמֹר: דְּבַר
 הָאִישׁ אֲדֹנֵי הָאֶרֶץ אֲתָנוּ
 קָשׁוֹת וַיִּתֵּן אֲתָנוּ
 בְּמִרְגָּלִים אֶת הָאֶרֶץ:
 וַנֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בְּנִים אֲנַחְנוּ
 לֹא הִיֵּינוּ מִרְגָּלִים: שָׁנִים
 עָשׂוּר אֲנַחְנוּ אֲחִים בְּנֵי
 אָבִינוּ הָאֶחָד אֵינָנו
 וְהַקֵּטָן הַיּוֹם אֶת אָבִינוּ
 בְּאֶרֶץ בְּנֵעַן: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
 הָאִישׁ אֲדֹנֵי הָאֶרֶץ בְּזֹאת
 אֲדַע כִּי בְנִים אַתֶּם
 אֲחֵיכֶם הָאֶחָד הִנִּיחוּ
 אֹתִי וְאֵת רַעְבּוֹן בְּתֵיכֶם

*But you would not listen,
 so for his blood – now, satisfaction is demanded!”*
 Now they did not know that Joseph was listening, for a translator was
 between them.
 But he turned away from them and wept.
 Then he returned to them; he spoke to them and had Shimon taken away from
 them, and imprisoning him before their eyes.
 And Joseph commanded that they fill their vessels with grain and return their
 silver-pieces into each man’s sack,
 and give them provisions for the journey.
 They did so for them.
 Then they loaded their rations onto their donkeys and went from there.
 But one opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the night-camp,
 and he saw his silver – now here, it was in the mouth of his pack!
 He said to his brothers:
“My silver has been returned – yes, here in my pack!”
 Their hearts gave way, and they trembled to one another, saying:
“What, now, has God done to us?”
 They came home to Jacob their father, in the land of Canaan,
 and told him all that had befallen them, saying:
*“The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly with us,
 he took us for those that spy on the land!
 Now we said to him: ‘We are honest, we have never been spies!
 We are twelve, brothers all, sons of our father:
 one is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in the land of Canaan.’*

קחו וּלְכוּ: וְהָבִיאוּ אֶת
 אֲחֵיכֶם הַקָּטָן אֵלַי וְאִדְעָה
 כִּי לֹא מְרִגְלִים אַתֶּם כִּי
 בָּנִים אַתֶּם אֶת אֲחֵיכֶם
 אַתֶּן לָכֶם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ
 תִּסְחֲרוּ: וַיְהִי הֵם מְרִיקִים
 שְׁקִיָּהֶם וְהִנֵּה אִישׁ צֹרֹר
 בִּסְפוֹ בְּשָׁקוֹ וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת
 צֹרֹרוֹת בִּסְפֵיָהֶם הֵמָּה
 וַאֲבִיהֶם וַיִּירְאוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר
 אֲלֵהֶם יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם אֲתִי
 שְׂכַלְתֶּם יוֹסֵף אֵינְנוּ
 וְשִׁמְעוֹן אֵינְנוּ וְאֶת בְּנֵימִן
 תִּקְחוּ עָלַי הֲיִינוּ כָלָנָה:
 וַיֹּאמֶר רְאוּבֵן אֶל אָבִיו
 לֵאמֹר אֶת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי תָמִית
 אִם לֹא אָבִיָּאֲנוּ אֵלַיָּה
 תָּנָה אֹתוֹ עַל יָדִי וְאֲנִי
 אֲשִׁיבֶנּוּ אֵלַיָּה: וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא
 יֵרֵד בְּנֵי עִמְכֶם כִּי אֲחִיו
 מֵת וְהוּא לְבָדּוֹ נִשְׁאַר
 וְקִרְאָהוּ אֶסּוֹן בְּדֶרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר
 תֵּלְכוּ בָּהּ וְהוֹרְדְתֶם אֹת
 שִׁיבֹתִי בִּיגּוֹן שְׂאוּלָּה:
 וְהִרְעַב כָּבֵד בְּאֶרֶץ: וַיְהִי
 כַּאֲשֶׁר כָּלוּ לְאָכֹל אֶת
 הַשֶּׁבֶר אֲשֶׁר הָבִיאוּ
 מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם
 אֲבִיהֶם שִׁבוּ שְׁכְרוּ לָנוּ

*Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us:
 ‘Hereby shall I know whether you are honest:
 leave one of your brothers with me,
 and as for the famine-supply of your households, take it and go.
 But bring your youngest brother to me,
 so that I may know that you are not spies, that you are honest.
 Then I will give your brother back to you, and you may travel about the land.’”*
 But it was, when they emptied their sacks: there was each man’s silver pouch
 in his sack!
 They looked at their silver pouches, they and their father, and became
 frightened.
 Jacob their father said to them:
*“Me you have bereaved!
 Joseph is no more,
 Shimon is no more,
 and Benjamin you would take away –
 to me has all this happened!”*
 Reuben said to his father, saying:
*“My two sons you may put to death
 if I do not bring him back to you!
 Place him in my hands, and I myself will return him to you.”*
 But Jacob said:
*“My son is not to go down with you!
 For his brother is dead,
 and he alone is left!*

מַעַט אָכַל: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
יְהוּדָה לֵאמֹר הֵעֵד הָעֵד
בְּנוֹ הָאִישׁ לֵאמֹר לֹא
תָּרָאוּ פָנַי בְּלִתִּי אַחֲיֶיכֶם
אַתָּכֶם: אִם יִשָּׁף מִשְׁלַח
אֶת אַחֲיָנֹו אֶתְנֹו נִרְדָּה
וְנִשְׁבְּרָה לָּהּ אָכַל: וְאִם
אֵינָהּ מִשְׁלַח לֹא נִרְדּ בִּי
הָאִישׁ אָמַר אֲלֵינוּ לֹא
תָּרָאוּ פָנַי בְּלִתִּי אַחֲיֶיכֶם
אַתָּכֶם: וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל
לְמָה הִרְעַתֶּם לִי לְהַגִּיד
לְאִישׁ הָעוֹד לָכֶם אָח:
וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׂאוּל שְׂאֵל
הָאִישׁ לָנוּ וּלְמוֹלְדֹתָנוּ
לֵאמֹר הָעוֹד אֲבִיכֶם חַי
הִישׁ לָכֶם אָח וְנָגֵד לוֹ עַל
פִּי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הַיְדוּעַ
נִדַּע בִּי יֹאמֶר הוֹרִידוּ אֶת
אַחֲיֶיכֶם: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה
אֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל אָבִיו שְׁלַחָה
הַנֶּעַר אִתִּי וְנִקְוָמָה וְנִלְכָּה
וְנִחְיָה וְלֹא נָמוּת גַּם
אֲנַחְנוּ גַם אֶתָּה גַם טַפָּנוּ:
אָנֹכִי אֶעֱרָבְנוּ מִיָּדִי
תִּבְקָשׁנוּ אִם לֹא הִבִּיאֲתִיו
אֵלַיָּה וְהִצַּגְתִּיו לְפָנֶיךָ
וְחָטַאתִי לָּךְ כָּל הַיָּמִים:
כִּי לֹאֵל הַתְּמָהֲמָהֵנוּ בִּי

*Should harm befall him on the journey on which you are going,
you will bring down my grey hair in grief to She'ol!"*

But the famine was heavy in the land.

*And so it was, when they had finished eating the rations that they had brought
from Egypt,*

that their father said to them:

"Return, buy us a little food."

But Judah said to him, saying:

"The man warned, yes, warned us,

saying: 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.'

If you wish to send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you some food.

But if you do not wish to send him, we will not go down,

for the man said to us: 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.'"

Jacob said:

*"Why did you deal so ill with me, by telling the man that you have another
brother?"*

They said:

"The man asked, he asked about us and about our kindred,

saying: 'Is your father still alive? Do you have another brother?'

So we told him, according to these words.

Could we know, know that he would say: 'Bring your brother down?'"

Judah said to Jacob his father:

"Send the lad with me,

and we will arise and go,

that we may live and not die,

עָתָה שְׁבֹנוּ זֶה פְּעָמִים:
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל
 אֲבִיָּהֶם אִם בֶּן אֶפּוֹא זֹאת
 עֲשׂוּ קָחוּ מִזֶּמֶרֶת הָאָרֶץ
 בְּכֵלֵיכֶם וְהוֹרִידוּ לְאִישׁ
 מִנְּחָה מַעֲט צָרִי וּמַעֲט
 דְּבַשׁ נִבְאֹת וְלֹט בְּטָנִים
 וּשְׁקָדִים: וְכֶסֶף מִשְׁנֶה
 קָחוּ בְיָדְכֶם וְאֵת הַכֶּסֶף
 הַמּוֹשֵׁב בְּפִי אֲמַתְחֹתֵיכֶם
 תָּשִׁיבוּ בְיָדְכֶם אוֹלִי
 מִשְׁנֶה הוּא: וְאֵת אַחֲיֵיכֶם
 קָחוּ וְקוּמוּ שׁוּבוּ אֶל
 הָאִישׁ: וְאֵל שְׂדֵי יִתֵּן לָכֶם
 רְחֻמִּים לִפְנֵי הָאִישׁ
 וְשַׁלַּח לָכֶם אֶת אַחֲיֵיכֶם
 אַחֵר וְאֵת בְּנֵימִן וְאֲנִי
 בְּאֶשֶׁר שְׁכַלְתִּי שְׁכַלְתִּי:
 וַיִּקְחוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶת
 הַמִּנְחָה הַזֹּאת וּמִשְׁנֶה
 כֶּסֶף לְקָחוּ בְיָדָם וְאֵת
 בְּנֵימִן וַיִּקְמוּ וַיֵּרְדּוּ
 מִצְרַיִם וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ לִפְנֵי
 יוֹסֵף: וַיֵּרָא יוֹסֵף אֹתָם
 אֶת בְּנֵימִן וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַשֵּׁר
 עַל בֵּיתוֹ הֲבֵא אֶת
 הָאֲנָשִׁים הַבָּיְתָה וּטְבַח
 טֶבַח וְהָכֵן כִּי אֲתִי יֵאָכְלוּ
 הָאֲנָשִׁים בְּצֹהֲרֵי: וַיַּעַשׂ

so we, so you, so our little-ones!
I will act as his pledge,
at my hand you may seek him!
If I do not bring him back to you
and set him in your presence,
I will be culpable-for-sin against you all the days to come.
For had we not lingered, we would indeed have been back twice by now!"
 Jacob their father said to them:
 "If it must be so, then, do this:
take some of the produce of the land in your vessels
and bring them down to the man as a gift:
a little balsam, a little honey, balm and laudanum, pistachio nuts and almonds.
And silver two times over take in your hand,
and the silver that was returned in the mouth of your packs, return in your hand;
perhaps it was an oversight.
And as for your brother, take him!
Arise, return to the man,
and may God Almighty give you mercy before the man,
so that he releases your other brother to you, and Benjamin as well.
And as for me – if I must be bereaved, I must be bereaved!"
 The men took this gift, and silver two times over they took in their hand
 and Benjamin as well.
 They arose and went down to Egypt
 and stood in Joseph's presence.
 When Joseph saw Benjamin with them,

הָאִישׁ בָּאֶשֶׁר אָמַר יוֹסֵף
וַיָּבֹא הָאִישׁ אֶת הָאֲנָשִׁים
בֵּיתָה יוֹסֵף: וַיִּירָאוּ
הָאֲנָשִׁים כִּי הוּבְאוּ בֵּית
יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמְרוּ עַל דְּבַר
הַכֶּסֶף הַשֶּׁב בְּאַמְתָּחֲתֵינוּ
בַּתְּחִלָּה אֲנִיחֵנוּ מוֹבָאִים
לְהַתְּגַלֵּל עֲלֵינוּ וּלְהַתְּנַפֵּל
עֲלֵינוּ וּלְקַחַת אֹתֵנוּ
לְעִבָדִים וְאֵת חֲמֹרֵינוּ:
וַיִּגֹּשׁוּ אֶל הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר עַל
בֵּית יוֹסֵף וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֵלָיו
פָּתַח הַבַּיִת: וַיֹּאמְרוּ בִּי
אֲדֹנָי יָרֵד יִרְדְּנוּ בַּתְּחִלָּה
לְשֹׁכֵר אֶכֶל: וַיְהִי כִּי בָּאוּ
אֶל הַמְּלֹאֵן וַנִּפְתָּחָה אֶת
אַמְתָּחֲתֵינוּ וְהִנֵּה כֶסֶף
אִישׁ בְּפִי אַמְתָּחָתוֹ
כֶּסֶפֵּנוּ בְּמִשְׁקָלוֹ וַנִּשָּׁב
אוֹתוֹ בְּיָדֵנוּ: וְכֶסֶף אַחֵר
הוֹרְדְנוּ בְּיָדֵנוּ לְשֹׁכֵר אֶכֶל
לֹא יִדְעֵנוּ מִי שֵׁם כֶּסֶפֵּנוּ
בְּאַמְתָּחֲתֵינוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר
שָׁלוֹם לָכֶם אֵל תִּירָאוּ
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹיְכֶם
נָתַן לָכֶם מִטָּמוֹן
בְּאַמְתָּחֲתֵיכֶם כֶּסֶפְכֶם בָּא
אֵלַי וַיּוֹצֵא אֲלֵהֶם אֶת
שִׁמְעוֹן: וַיָּבֹא הָאִישׁ אֶת

he said to the steward of his house:

“Bring the men into the house, slaughter some slaughter-animals and prepare them,

for it is with me that these men shall eat at noon.”

The man did as Joseph had said: the man brought the men into Joseph’s house.

But the men were frightened that they had been brought into Joseph’s house, and said:

“It is because of the silver that was returned in our packs before that we have been brought here,

for them to roll upon us, and fall upon us,

and take us into servitude, along with our donkeys!”

They came close to the man, to the steward of Joseph’s house, and spoke to him at the entrance to the house,

they said:

“Please, my lord!

We came down, came down previously to buy food-rations,

but it was, when we came to the night camp and opened our packs,

there was each man’s silver in the mouth of his pack, our silver by its exact weight – but we have returned it in our hand!

And other silver as well we have brought down in our hand, to buy food.

We do not know who put back our silver in our packs!”

He said:

“It is well with you – do not be afraid!

Your God, the God of your father, placed a treasure in your packs for you; your silver has come in to me.”

הָאֲנָשִׁים בֵּיתָהּ יוֹסֵף וַיִּתֵּן
מִמֶּיִם וַיִּרְחֹצוּ רַגְלֵיהֶם וַיִּתֵּן
מִסְפּוֹא לַחֲמֹרֵיהֶם: וַיְכִינּוּ
אֶת הַמִּנְחָה עַד בּוֹא יוֹסֵף
בְּצֹהָרִים כִּי שָׁמְעוּ כִּי שָׁם
יֵאכְלוּ לֶחֶם: וַיָּבֹא יוֹסֵף
הַבֵּיתָה וַיְבִיאוּ לוֹ אֶת
הַמִּנְחָה אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדָם
הַבֵּיתָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לוֹ
אַרְצָה: וַיִּשְׁאַל לָהֶם
לְשָׁלוֹם וַיֹּאמֶר הַשְׁלוֹם
אֲבִיכֶם הַזֶּקֶן אֲשֶׁר
אָמַרְתֶּם הָעוֹדְנֵנוּ חַי:
וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׁלוֹם לְעַבְדְּךָ
לְאֲבִינוּ עוֹדְנֵנוּ חַי וַיִּקְדּוּ
וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ: וַיִּשָּׂא
עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת בְּנִימִין
אָחִיו בֶּן אָמֹן וַיֹּאמֶר הִזֶּה
אֲחִיכֶם הַקָּטָן אֲשֶׁר
אָמַרְתֶּם אֵלַי וַיֹּאמֶר
אֱלֹהִים יַחְנֶנּוּ בְנִי: וַיִּמְהַר
יוֹסֵף כִּי נִכְמְרוּ רַחֲמָיו אֶל
אָחִיו וַיִּבְקֶשׁ לִבְכוֹת וַיָּבֹא
הַחֲדָרָה וַיִּבֶה שָׁמָּה:
וַיִּרְחַץ פָּנָיו וַיֵּצֵא וַיִּתְאַפֵּק
וַיֹּאמֶר שִׁימוּ לֶחֶם:
וַיִּשְׁימוּ לוֹ לִבְדּוֹ וְלָהֶם
לִבְדָּם וְלַמַּצֹּרִים הָאֲכָלִים
אֹתוֹ לִבְדָּם כִּי לֹא יוּכְלוּן

And he brought Shimon out to them.
Then the man had the men come into Joseph's house
and gave them water so that they might wash their feet
and gave them fodder for their donkeys.
They prepared the gift, until Joseph came back at noon,
for they understood that they were to eat bread there.
Joseph came into the house, and they brought him the gift that was in their
hand, into the house,
and bowed low to him, to the earth.
He asked after their welfare and said:
*"Is your old father well, of whom you spoke?
Is he still alive?"*
They said:
"Your servant, our father, is well, he is still alive,"
and they did homage and bowed low.
He lifted up his eyes and saw Benjamin his brother, his mother's son,
and he said:
"Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me?"
And he said:
"May God show you favour, my son!"
And in haste – for his insides were so kindled toward his brother that he had to
weep –
Joseph entered an inner-room and wept there.
Then he washed his face and came out, restrained himself, and said:
"Serve bread!"

הַמִּצְרִים לֶאֱכֹל אֶת
הָעִבְרִים לֶחֶם בִּי תוֹעֵבָה
הוּא לַמִּצְרִים: וַיָּשׁוּבוּ
לִפְנֵי הַבֶּכֶר בְּבִכְרָתוֹ
וְהִצְעִיר בְּצַעְרָתוֹ וַיִּתְמָהוּ
הָאֲנָשִׁים אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ:
וַיֵּשֶׂא מִשָּׂאת מֶאֶת פָּנָיו
אֲלֵהֶם וַתֵּרֶב מִשָּׂאת
בְּנִימָן מִמִּשָּׂאת כָּלֶם
חֲמֵשׁ יָדוֹת וַיִּשְׁתּוּ
וַיִּשְׂכְּרוּ עִמּוֹ: וַיֵּצֵאוּ אֶת
אֲשֶׁר עַל בֵּיתוֹ לֵאמֹר
מִלֵּא אֶת אֲמֻתָּחַת
הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲכֹל בָּאֲשֶׁר
יִכְלוּן שָׂאת וְשִׁים בְּסֶף
אִישׁ בְּפִי אֲמֻתָּחוֹ: וְאֵת
גְּבִיעֵי גְבִיעַ הַבְּסֶף תָּשִׂים
בְּפִי אֲמֻתָּחַת הַקֶּטָן וְאֵת
בְּסֶף שִׁכְרוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ כַּדָּבָר
יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר: הַבֶּקֶר
אוֹר וְהָאֲנָשִׁים שָׁלְחוּ
הֵמָּה וַחֲמֹרֵיהֶם: הֵם יֵצְאוּ
אֶת הָעִיר לֹא הִרְחִיקוּ
וַיֹּסֶף אָמַר לְאֲשֶׁר עַל
בֵּיתוֹ קוּם רְדֵף אַחֲרַי
הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהִשְׁגָּתָם
וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם לָמָּה
שָׁלַמְתֶּם רָעָה תַּחַת
טוֹבָה: הֲלוֹא זֶה אֲשֶׁר

They served him by himself and them by themselves and the Egyptians who
were eating with him by themselves,
for Egyptians will not eat bread with Hebrews – for that is an abomination for
Egyptians.
But they were seated in his presence:
the firstborn according to his rank-as-firstborn and the youngest according to
his rank-as-youngest.
And the men stared at each other in astonishment over it.
He had courses taken to them from his presence,
and Benjamin's course was five times greater than all their courses.
And they drank and became drunk with him.
Then he commanded the steward of his house, saying:
*"Fill the men's packs with food, as much as they are able to carry,
and put each man's silver in the mouth of his pack.
And my goblet, the silver goblet, put in the mouth of the youngest's pack, along
with the silver for his rations."*
He did according to Joseph's word which he had spoken.
At the light of daybreak, the men were sent off, they and their donkeys;
they were just outside the city – they had not yet gone far – when
Joseph said to the steward of his house:
*"Up, pursue the men, and when you have caught up with them, say to them:
'Why have you paid back ill for good?
Is not this goblet, the one that my lord drinks with?
And he also divines, yes, divines with it!
You have wrought ill in what you have done!'"*

יִשְׁתָּה אֲדֹנִי בּוֹ וְהוּא נִחַשׁ
 יִנְחֹשׁ בּוֹ הִרְעַתָּם אֲשֶׁר
 עָשִׂיתָם: וַיִּשְׁגֹּם וַיְדַבֵּר
 אֲלֵהֶם אֶת הַדְּבָרִים
 הָאֵלֶּה: וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו לָמָּה
 יְדַבֵּר אֲדֹנִי כַּדְּבָרִים
 הָאֵלֶּה חֲלִילָה לַעֲבֹדֶיךָ
 מַעֲשׂוֹת כַּדְּבָר הַזֶּה: הֵן
 כֶּסֶף אֲשֶׁר מָצְאָנוּ בְּפִי
 אִמְתָּחִינוּ הִשְׁיבֵנוּ אֵלֶיךָ
 מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וְאִיךָ נִגְנֹב
 מִבֵּית אֲדֹנֶיךָ כֶּסֶף אוֹ
 זָהָב: אֲשֶׁר יִמָּצָא אֹתוֹ
 מַעֲבָדֶיךָ וְנָתַתָּ וְגַם אֲנַחְנוּ
 נִהְיֶה לְאֲדֹנֶי לַעֲבָדִים:
 וַיֹּאמֶר גַּם עֲתָה כַּדְּבָרֵיכֶם
 כֵּן הוּא אֲשֶׁר יִמָּצָא אֹתוֹ
 יִהְיֶה לִּי עֶבֶד וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ
 נָקִים: וַיִּמְהָרוּ וַיּוֹרְדוּ
 אִישׁ אֶת אִמְתָּחוֹ אֶרְצָה
 וַיִּפְתְּחוּ אִישׁ אִמְתָּחוֹ:
 וַיִּחַפֵּשׂ בַּגָּדוֹל הַחֹל וּבִקְטָן
 כָּלָה וַיִּמָּצָא הַגִּבִּיעַ
 בְּאִמְתָּחַת בְּנִימִן: וַיִּקְרְעוּ
 שְׁמֹלֹתָם וַיַּעֲמִס אִישׁ עַל
 חֻמְרוֹ וַיָּשֻׁבוּ הָעִירָה:
 וַיָּבֹא יְהוּדָה וְאָחִיו בֵּיתָה
 יוֹסֵף וְהוּא עוֹדֵנוּ שָׁם
 וַיִּפְּלוּ לִפְנֵי אֶרְצָה:

He caught up with them, and spoke those words to them.
 They said to him:
*"Why does my lord speak such words as these?
 Heaven forbid for your servants to do such a thing!
 Here, the silver that we found in the mouth of our packs, we returned to you from
 the land of Canaan,
 so how could we steal silver or gold from the house of your lord?
 The one with whom it is found among your servants, he shall die,
 and we also will become my lord's servants!"*
 He said:
*"Now as well, according to your words, so be it:
 the one with whom it is found shall become my servant, but you shall be clear."*
 With haste each one let down his pack to the ground, and each one opened his
 pack.
 And then he searched: with the eldest he started and with the youngest he
 finished –
 and the goblet was found in Benjamin's pack!
 They rent their clothes,
 and each one loaded up his donkey, and they returned to the city.
 Judah and his brothers came into Joseph's house
 – he was still there –
 and flung themselves down before him to the earth.
 Joseph said to them:
*"What kind of deed is this that you have done!
 Do you not know that a man like me can divine, yes, divine?"*

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם יוֹסֵף מָה
 הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר
 עָשִׂיתֶם הַלּוֹא יָדַעְתֶּם כִּי
 נִחַשׁ יִנְחָשׁ אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר
 בָּמִנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה מֶה
 נֹאמַר לֵאדֹנִי מֶה נִדְבָּר
 וַיְמַה נִּצְטַדֵּק הָאֱלֹהִים
 מִצָּא אֶת עֹזֶן עֲבָדֶיךָ הַנֶּנִּי
 עֲבָדִים לֵאדֹנִי גַם אֲנִי
 גַם אֲשֶׁר נִמְצָא הַגִּבִּיעַ
 בְּיָדוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר חֲלִילָה לִּי
 מִעֲשׂוֹת זֹאת הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר
 נִמְצָא הַגִּבִּיעַ בְּיָדוֹ הוּא
 יִהְיֶה לִּי עֶבֶד וְאַתֶּם עֲלוּ
 לְשָׁלוֹם אֶל אֲבִיכֶם: ...
 וַעֲתָה יֵשֶׁב נָא עִבְדְּךָ
 תַּחַת הַנֶּעֱר עֶבֶד לֵאדֹנִי
 וְהַנֶּעֱר יַעַל עִם אֲחָיו: כִּי
 אִיךָ אֶעֱלֶה אֶל אָבִי
 וְהַנֶּעֱר אֵינְנוּ אִתִּי כֵּן
 אֲרָאָה בָּרַע אֲשֶׁר יִמָּצָא
 אֶת אָבִי: וְלֹא יָכֵל יוֹסֵף
 לְהִתְאַפֵּק לְכָל הַנֹּצְצִים
 עָלָיו וַיִּקְרָא הוֹצִיאוּ כָל
 אִישׁ מֵעָלָי וְלֹא עָמַד אִישׁ
 אִתּוֹ בְּהִתְנוּדַע יוֹסֵף אֶל
 אֲחָיו: וַיִּתֵּן אֶת קִלּוֹ בְּבִכְי
 וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּשְׁמַע
 בֵּית פַּרְעֹה: וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף

Judah said:
 “What can we say to my lord?
 What can we speak, by what can we show ourselves innocent?
 God has found out your servants’ crime!
 Here we are, servants to my lord, so we, so the one in whose hand the goblet was found.”
 But he said:
 “Heaven forbid that I should do this!
 The man in whose hand the goblet was found – he shall become my servant,
 but you – go up in peace to your father!”
 Then Judah said:
 “So now,
 pray let your servant stay instead of the lad, as servant to my lord,
 but let the lad go up with his brothers!
 For how can I go up to my father, when the lad is not with me?
 Then would I see the ill-fortune that would come upon my father!”
 Joseph could no longer restrain himself in the presence of all who were
 stationed around him;
 he called out:
 “Have everyone leave me!”
 So no one stood in attendance upon him when Joseph made himself known to
 his brothers.
 He put forth his voice in weeping:
 the Egyptians heard, and Pharaoh’s household heard.
 Then Joseph said to his brothers:

אֶל אָחִיו אָנִי יוֹסֵף הָעוֹד
 אָבִי חַי וְלֹא יָכְלוּ אָחִיו
 לַעֲנוֹת אוֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהָלוּ
 מִפָּנָיו: וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל
 אָחִיו גִּשּׁוּ נָא אֵלַי וַיִּגְשׁוּ
 וַיֹּאמֶר אָנִי יוֹסֵף אֲחֵיכֶם
 אֲשֶׁר מָכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי
 מִצְרַיִמָּה: וַעֲתָה אֵל
 תַּעֲצְבוּ וְאֵל יִחַר בְּעֵינֵיכֶם
 כִּי מָכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי הֲנֵה כִּי
 לְמַחֲיָה שָׁלַחֲנִי אֱלֹהִים
 לִפְנֵיכֶם: כִּי זֶה שְׁנָתִים
 הָרַעַב בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ וְעוֹד
 חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר אֵין
 חֲרִישׁ וְקָצִיר: וַיִּשְׁלַחֲנִי
 אֱלֹהִים לִפְנֵיכֶם לָשׂוּם
 לָכֶם שְׂאֲרִית בָּאָרֶץ
 וּלְהַחְיֹת לָכֶם לְפָלִיטָה
 גְּדֹלָה: וַעֲתָה לֹא אֶתֶם
 שֹׁלְחָתֶם אֹתִי הֲנֵה כִּי
 הָאֱלֹהִים וַיְשִׁימֵנִי לְאָב
 לְפָרְעָה וּלְאֲדוֹן לְכָל בֵּיתוֹ
 וַיִּמְשָׁל בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:
 מִהֲרוּ וַעֲלוּ אֵל אָבִי
 וְאָמַרְתֶּם אֵלָיו בְּהָ אָמַר
 בְּנֵה יוֹסֵף שְׁמִנִי אֱלֹהִים
 לְאֲדוֹן לְכָל מִצְרַיִם רָדָה
 אֵלַי אֵל תַּעֲמֹד: וַיִּשְׁבֹּתָ
 בָּאָרֶץ גִּשְׁן וְהָיִיתָ קְרוֹב

"I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?"

But his brothers were not able to answer him,
for they were terrified before him.

Joseph said to his brothers:

"Pray come close to me!"

They came close.

He said:

"I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.

But now, do not be pained,

and do not let upset be in your eyes that you sold me here!

For it was to save life that God sent me on before you.

For it is two years now that the famine has been in the midst of the land,

and there are still another five years in which there shall be no plowing or harvest.

So God sent me on ahead of you

to make you a remnant on earth,

to keep you alive as a great body-of-survivors.

So now,

it was not you that sent me here, but God!

He has made me chancellor to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Make haste, go up to my father and say to him:

'Thus says your son, Joseph:

"God has made me lord of all Egypt;

come down to me, do not remain!

You shall stay in the region of Goshen, you shall be near me,

אֲלֵי אֶתָּה וּבְנֶיךָ וּבְנֵי
בְּנֶיךָ וְצֹאנֶךָ וּבְקָרְךָ וְכָל
אֲשֶׁר לְךָ: וְכָל־כְּלִיתִי אֶתָּה
שָׁם כִּי עוֹד חֲמִשׁ שָׁנִים
רָעָב פֶּן תִּהְיֶה אֶתָּה
וּבֵיתְךָ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְךָ:
וְהִנֵּה עֵינֶיכֶם רֹאוֹת וְעֵינֵי
אָחִי בְנִימִין כִּי פִי
הִמְדַּבֵּר אֲלֵיכֶם: וְהִגַּדְתֶּם
לְאָבִי אֵת כָּל כְּבוֹדִי
בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר
רָאִיתֶם וּמַהֲרַתֶּם
וְהוֹרַדְתֶּם אֶת אָבִי הֵנָּה:
וַיִּפֹּל עַל צוּאְרֵי בְנֵימִין
אָחִיו וַיִּבְּךָ וּבְנֵימִין בָּכָה
עַל צוּאְרָיו: וַיִּנָּשֶׁק לְכָל
אָחִיו וַיִּבְּךָ עֲלֵהֶם וְאַחֲרֵי
כֵן דִּבְּרוּ אָחִיו אִתּוֹ: וְהָקֵל
נִשְׁמַע בֵּית פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר
בָּאוּ אָחֵי יוֹסֵף וַיִּיטֹב
בְּעֵינֵי פַרְעֹה וּבְעֵינֵי
עֲבָדָיו:

*you and your sons and the sons of your sons,
your sheep, your oxen, and all that is yours.
I will sustain you there,
for there are still five years of famine left
– lest you be as disinherited, you and your household and all that is yours.”*
*Here, your eyes see, as well as my brother Benjamin’s eyes, that it is my mouth that
speaks to you!*
*So tell my father of all the weight I carry in Egypt, and of all that you have seen,
and make haste, bring my father down here!”*
He flung himself upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept,
and Benjamin wept upon his neck.
Then he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them.
After this his brothers spoke with him.
The news was heard in Pharaoh’s household; they said:
Joseph’s brothers have come!
It was good in Pharaoh’s eyes and in the eyes of his servants.

Notes...

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

Part 10: gender



BEAUTY

Genesis 29:17ⁱ

וְרַחֵל הָיְתָה יְפֹת תֹאֵר וַיִּפֹּת מִרְאָה:

Rachel was shapely and beautiful.

Genesis 39:6ⁱⁱ

וַיְהִי יוֹסֵף יָפֵה תֹאֵר וַיִּפֶּה מִרְאָה:

Now Joseph was well built and handsome.

BODY

Genesis 43:30

נִבְמְרוּ רִחְמָיו אֶל-אָחִיו וַיִּבְקֹשׁ
לִבְבוֹת.

Joseph's insides were so kindled toward his brother that he had to weep.
(EVERETT FOX TRANSLATION)

Joseph was overcome with feeling toward his brother and was on the verge of tears.

(NJPS TRANSLATION)

Joseph's bowels did yearn upon his brother and he sought where to weep.
(KING JAMES TRANSLATION)

Genesis 46:20ⁱⁱⁱ

וַיֵּלֶד לְיוֹסֵף בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לוֹ
אֶסְנַת בַּת פּוֹטִי פָרַע כֹּהֵן אֵן אֶת מְנַשֶּׁה וְאֶת
אֶפְרַיִם:

To Joseph were born in the land of Egypt Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath daughter of Poti-phares priest of On bore to him.

ⁱ NJPS translation

ⁱⁱ NJPS translation

ⁱⁱⁱ NJPS translation

SOUL

b.Berachot 60a

אמר רב לאחר שדנה לאה דין בעצמה
ואמרה שנים עשר שבטים עתידין
לצאת מיעקב ששה יצאו ממני,
וארבעה מן השפחות הרי עשרה אם
זה זכר לא תהא אחותי רחל כאחת
השפחות מיד נהפכה לבת.

Rav said: Leah gave judgement against herself, saying: “*Twelve tribes will emerge from Jacob. I have given birth to six. The handmaids have given birth to two each. That makes ten. If the child with whom I am pregnant turns out to be a son, my sister Rachel will not even be equal to the handmaids.*” At once, the foetus transformed into a daughter.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis 30:21

אתחלפו עוברייא במעהון והוה
יהיב יוסף במעהא דרחל ודינה
במעהא דלאה.

The foetuses in Leah’s and Rachel’s wombs were swapped: Joseph was transferred into Rachel’s womb and Dinah was transferred into Leah’s womb.

SEXUALITY

Midrash ha-Gadol to Genesis 37:2

והוא נער את־בני בלהה ואת־בני זלפה — שהיו
בני השפחות מנשקין אותו ומגפפין אותו.

And Joseph was a lad with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. That is, the sons of the handmaids used to kiss him and hug him.

GENDER

Genesis Rabbah 84:7

והוא נער את־בני בלהה ואת־בני זלפה —
שהיה עושה מעשה נערות, ממשמש
בעיניו מתלה בעקיבו מתקן בשערו.

And Joseph was a lad with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. That is, he engaged in girlish^{iv} behaviour with them, painting his eyes, lifting his heel and curling his hair.

^{iv} This might be more straightforwardly translated as ‘childish’, but ‘girlish’ is an entirely apt translation as well. See Wendy Zierler, “Joseph(ine), the Singer: the queer Joseph and modern Jewish writers”, *Nashim* 24 (2013), 97-119: 100.

SEX

Nurit Zarchi^v

The son isn't his son.

The man closes his eyes and opens them again. No, it's not a mirage. This son, the son born to his wife in his old age, is a girl.

The man isn't angry, he knows that his wife did this out of her love for him, she wanted to please him, she wanted to believe that he had an heir. For many years his wife was unable to bear him a son. Again and again she consulted doctors, witches, and soothsayers, and in the end, when she gave birth, she tricked him and pretended that the baby was a boy.

The man bends a little so they won't see him. He goes on watching. Now, in the light of the lamp which the mother lights, the little girl looks just like a boy. The man turns, his shoulders bowed, and walks away. He would never tell his wife that he had discovered her secret, because his soul was bound to hers, and because she was about to die, a death which ended the life of a woman who obtained her wish too late in life and at a cost greater than life.

^v Nurit Zarchi, "And She is Joseph" (trans Dalya Bilu), in Miryam Glazer (ed), *Dreaming the Actual: contemporary fiction and poetry by Israeli women writers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000): 19-23. Abridged.

Notes...