

בראשית מ"ד:י"ח
(יח) ויגש אליו יהודה...

Genesis 44:18

(18) Then Judah approached...

Thus begins one of the longest speeches in the Torah. What were Judah's motivations? The rabbis are divided on this. R. Judah says Judah was motivated by a need to assert power. Understanding that this was indeed a conflict with existential consequences, and that the disguised Joseph was an adversary, he entered this moment as if he was engaged in battle. R. Nehemiah says that Judah was motivated by a need to achieve reconciliation. Understanding that the future of the family depended on a peaceful resolution to this crisis and that the disguised Joseph could become an ally, Judah entered this moment as a negotiator. The Rabbis picture Judah as overcome by the gravity of this moment and see him turning to God in prayer prior to turning to Joseph. Is this a moment of conflict, reconciliation, or spiritual destiny?

בראשית מ"ה:ג-ד
(ג) ויאמר יוסף אל-אחיו אגני יוסף העוד אבי חי ולא יקלו אחיו לענות אתו כי נבקלו מפניו: (ד) ויאמר יוסף אל-אחיו גשו-נא אלי ויגשו ויאמר אני יוסף אחיכם אשר-מכרתם אתי מצרימה:

Genesis 45:3-4

(3) Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dumfounded were they on account of him. (4) Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come forward to me." And when they came forward, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, he whom you sold into Egypt.

This is **the** moment. But even though Joseph unmasks his true identity here and resolves all the dramatic tension in the story, we, like the brothers, are also dumfounded. He says, "**my** father" rather than "**our** father." That formulation attempts to reclaim and restore the preferential relationship of Jacob to Joseph. But then he says "I am Joseph **your** brother" which attempts to restore the fraternal relationship. "*Whom you sold into Egypt,*" reminds them of their culpability, and invites their apology.

בראשית מ"ה:ט"ז

(טז) והקל נשמע בית פרעה לאמר באו אחי יוסף וייטב בעיני פרעה ובעיני עבדיו:

Genesis 45:16

(16) The news reached Pharaoh's palace: "Joseph's brothers have come." Pharaoh and his courtiers were pleased.

We take a favorable view of this Pharaoh, as a generally kind and beneficent monarch. But let us not overlook his shrewd self-interest here. The resolution of Joseph's personal crisis is not only good for Joseph; it's good for Pharaoh.

בראשית מ"ה:כ"ו
(כו) ויגדו לו לאמר עוד יוסף חי וכיהוא משל בכל-ארץ מצרים ויפג לבו כי לא-האמין להם:

Genesis 45:26

(26) And they told him, "Joseph is still alive; yes, he is ruler over the whole land of Egypt." His heart went numb, for he did not believe them.

And this is another moment. Jacob's heart stops. This was probably not a "heart attack" as much as a "stress-induced" event followed by a rather quick recovery. Nevertheless, it was a lot of information to take in and it does indicate the emotional turmoil of someone whose reality has been upended. What and who do you believe under those circumstances? Note: it's probably better to break shocking news to a vulnerable person in a more controlled way.

בראשית מ"ו:ב-ד

(ב) ויאמר אלקים ל ישראל במראת הלילה ויאמר יעקב ויעקב ויאמר הנני: (ג) ויאמר אנכי האל אלקי אביך אל-תירא מרדה מצרימה כי-לגוי גדול אשימך שם: (ד) אנכי ארד עמה מצרימה ואנכי אעלה גם-עלה ויוסף ישית ידו על-עיניך:

Genesis 46:2-4

(2) God called to Israel in a vision by night: "Jacob! Jacob!" He answered, "Here." (3) And He said, "I am God, the God of your father. Fear not to go down to Egypt, for I will make you there into a great nation. (4) I Myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I Myself will also bring you back; and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes."

Jacob, now at Beersheva, has already initiated his descent to Egypt. He sacrifices to God and God answers him with the reassurance that the people will grow undisrupted by this upheaval. But it comes with the news that his days are numbered.

בראשית מ"ו:ל'
(ל) וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יֹסֵף אָמוּתָהּ הַפְּעַם אֶחָדִי רְאוּתִי אֶת-
פָּנָיִךְ כִּי עוֹדָה הִיא:

Genesis 46:30

(30) *Then Israel said to Joseph, "Now I can die, having seen for myself that you are still alive."*

And here, another great moment. We know that in seeing Joseph's face once more, we have the convergence of so many stories in Jacob's life. While this may have been an aesthetically pleasing time for Jacob to die, he still has 17 years of living to do.

בראשית מ"ז:ג'
(ג) וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל-אֶחָיו מִה־מַּעֲשֵׂיכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל-פַּרְעֹה
רַעָה צָאן עֲבָדֶיךָ גַּם-אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם-אֲבוֹתֵינוּ:

Genesis 47:3

(3) *Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" They answered Pharaoh, "We your servants are shepherds, as were also our fathers."*

Joseph has previously instructed his brothers to tell Pharaoh that they are "men of flocks" and specifically not to use the terminology, "shepherds," because that is somehow repugnant to Egyptians. But the brothers, in open defiance of Joseph, say to Pharaoh, "we are shepherds." In other words, we are proud of who we are and we are not going to yield to political gamesmanship. Something deeper is going on here. Being a "shepherd" subtly reinforces the notion that they are going to retain their freedom and their devotion to God rather than become subjects and eventually slaves to Pharaoh and to the state.

בראשית מ"ז:ז-ט'
(ז) וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת-יַעֲקֹב אָבִיו וַיַּעֲמֵדְהוּ לְפָנָיו פַּרְעֹה וַיְבָרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב
אֶת-פַּרְעֹה: (ח) וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל-יַעֲקֹב כַּמָּה יָמֵי שָׁנָיִךְ תִּיָּד: (ט)
וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל-פַּרְעֹה יָמַי שָׁנָיִךְ מִגּוֹרֵי שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה מֵעַתָּה
וְרָעִים הָיִו יָמַי שָׁנָיִךְ הֵי יוֹלָא הַשְׁיִיגוּ אֶת-יָמַי שָׁנָיִךְ תִּנִּי אֲבֹתַי בְּיָמַי
מִגּוֹרֵינִי:

Genesis 47:7-9

(7) *Joseph then brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh; and Jacob greeted Pharaoh. (8) Pharaoh asked Jacob, "How many are the years of your life?" (9) And Jacob answered Pharaoh, "The years of my sojourn [on earth] are one hundred and thirty. Few and hard have been the years of my life, nor do they come up to the life spans of my fathers during their sojourns."*

And here is yet another great moment in this parasha. The meeting of Pharaoh and Jacob is profoundly symbolic. We have the encounter

between Joseph's actual father and Joseph's symbolic, political father; his boss. Pharaoh is the sovereign but Jacob doesn't seem to be intimidated by that. While Pharaoh may have total power over Egypt, Jacob knows that there is a power higher than Pharaoh. "Blessing" Pharaoh may have been just an ordinary act of courtesy, but it also signifies without stating explicitly that Pharaoh is not a god; he is, like all of us, a creature of God. We note also that "blessing" was an important moment in Jacob's encounter with the mysterious assailant. "I won't let you go until you bless me" is what Jacob says. Likewise, the Pharaoh of the Exodus, wants Moses to "bless" him at the moment of departure. It's hard to know what to make of these instances. Adversarial relationships all require resolution. With the assailant Jacob gets a new name and a new destiny. With Jacob's encounter with Pharaoh here, Jacob establishes an entente for him and his descendants that will last until "a new Pharaoh arises who does not know Joseph." With Moses, resolution comes with the destruction of Pharaoh's army and chariots at the Sea of Reeds.

בראשית מ"ז:יא-י"ב'
(יא) וַיּוֹשֶׁב יוֹסֵף אֶת-אָבִיו וְאֶת-אֶחָיו וַיֹּתֵן לָהֶם אַחְזָה בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרָיִם בְּמִיטַב הָאֶרֶץ בְּאֶרֶץ רַעַמְסֵס פֶּאֶשֶׁר צִנְהַ פַּרְעֹה: (יב)
וַיַּכְלִיךְ יוֹסֵף אֶת-אָבִיו וְאֶת-אֶחָיו וְאֶת כָּל-בָּיִת אָבִיו לָחֶם לְפִי
הַטָּף:

Genesis 47:11-12

(11) *So Joseph settled his father and his brothers, giving them holdings in the choicest part of the land of Egypt, in the region of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. (12) Joseph sustained his father, and his brothers, and all his father's household with bread, down to the little ones.*

Are they grateful to him or are they now placed in an impossible situation of total dependence on him? Do they want to stay there, or do they want to go back "home" to Canaan?

בראשית מ"ז:כ"ג'
(כג) וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל-הָעָם הֲן קָנִיתִי אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם וְאֶת-
אֲדָמַתְכֶם לְפַרְעֹה הֲאֵלֵכֶם זֶרַע וְזָרַעְתֶּם אֶת-הָאֲדָמָה:

Genesis 47:23

(23) *Then Joseph said to the people, "Whereas I have this day acquired you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you to sow the land. With the entire people of Egypt now indebted to Pharaoh, Joseph has become the enforcer of Egyptian serfdom. Is this a good or bad thing? SHABBAT SHALOM!*