

DIVREI TORAH

1. Past several weeks -- heavy news from Israel, so sermons focused on public issues. Today, several unconnected insights and commentaries on Sidra.

2. Joseph's tears: four times do we read of them -- after Reuben's speech, after Judah's speech, meeting with Jacob, and death of Jacob. Interestingly, not once do we read of him crying for himself. No self-pity.

Can understand why he cried upon meeting Jacob, and when Jacob dies. What of Judah and Reuben?

Crying at Judah's speech is obviously one of joy at Judah's full repentance: leader of the brothers who sinned against a weaker brother, son of Rachel, is now willing to lay his life on the line for the other son of Rachel, the youngest brother. But why after Reuben's talk? Answer offered by Rabbi Zadok haCohen of Lublin. When Joseph demanded they bring Benjamin, we read:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֵל
אֲחִיו, אֲבֹתָ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי אֶרְאֶה לְפָנֶיךָ נָשָׂא בְּחַיָּתוֹ אֶתְנִי וְלֹא שְׂמַלְתִּי
עַל כֵּן בָּאָה אֶתְנִי הַזֶּה הַשָּׂא

Hence, it was only a partial repentance, *לְשׁוּבָה מִיָּדָה*, out of concern for the evil consequences to themselves. So does Reuben conclude: *לְשׁוּבָה מִיָּדָה -- וְיָרֵךְ בְּנִי זֶה*.

3. In Judah's speech he refers to Benjamin as *וַיֹּתֵר הָאֶבְדוֹ עָמָלִי*. But his mother was dead, having died at childbirth? The mention of Rachel points to an ancient tradition that Benjamin looked just like his mother, *וְכֵן שִׂרְאָהוּ אָמַר זֶה בֶּן רַחֵל*. Rabbi Benzion Firer: Thus can understand why Joseph insisted that they bring down Benjamin, despite the anguish it caused to Jacob, and why he used strange language, *וְאִשְׁמָה עֵינֵי עֲלִי* (not *וְאִרְאֵנִי*). Rabbi Firer calculates that Benjamin was then exactly 29 years old -- the exact age that Rachel was when she died in childbirth, bearing Benjamin. Joseph was then eight years old. In other words, he wanted to see Benjamin, because the striking similarity of Benjamin to Rachel will revive in Joseph's memory the picture of his mother as she looked before she passed away at that early age.

4. Again in Judah's speech: Do not get angry with me, *בִּי כְחֹק בְּפָרֹעַ*. Rabbi Zvi Elimelekh Shapira of Dinov: Joseph was superior to Pharaoh in two ways -- according to latter's own admission. In *חֲכָמָה*, thus Pharaoh says: *אֵין נָבוֹן וְחָכָם כְּחֹק*. The second way is *נְבוּאָה*, the spiritual dimension, thus Pharaoh says: *הַנֶּחֱמָה כְּזֶה אִישׁ אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֵלֶּם בִּי*. So, Judah tells Joseph, don't lose your temper, because the Sages said: *כֵּן הַכּוֹסִים אֵם חָכָם הוּא חֲכָמָהוּ מְסַלְּקָה מִמֶּנּוּ, וְאֵם נְבוּאָה הוּא נְבוּאָהוּ מְסַלְּקָה מִמֶּנּוּ*.

Therefore if you become angry, you will lose both your חכמה and your נביאה, and therefore will be superior in no way to Pharaoh: *כי בלתי נביאך בפרעה*.

5. Joseph gives gifts of clothing to the brothers, *חליפות שמלות*. Notice that he gives these gifts to all the brothers, but not to Jacob. Why? Because clothing symbolizes adjustment, adaptation, and acculturation. He knew the brothers would Egyptianize, even while remaining Hebrews within, but that Jacob could not, cannot, and will not so adapt.

Benno Jacob sees in the gift of clothing to the brothers a sign of Joseph's magnanimous and aristocratic spirit. The brothers sinned against him because of clothing -- the *כניפות דמסים*; and so his gift of clothing, *חליפות שמלות*, was the synonym of full pardon and utter reconciliation.

6. The trip to Egypt to fetch Jacob: Next week we will read about how all the brothers, including Joseph, leave to bury Jacob in Canaan. One distinguished member of this congregation, a young lady of nine years old, last week asked me: Why did they not stay there, and thus avoid the entire *מלחמת מצרים*? Why did they come back?

The answer is that Joseph and his brothers, even at the height of their friendship with Egypt and the height of Joseph's career, were always conscious of the fact that they were Jews, and therefore suspected. The theme of dual loyalty. We American Jews may be in a similar position, even worse. This week I received a letter with a red printed swastika and the words, "We're back."

הק"ל נשאל בית פרעה... ויטב בעיני פרעה ובעיני עבדיו

Why? Sforno: Heretofore, they suspected that Joseph was not totally loyal to Egypt, but rather to his family and tribe in Canaan. So now if all of them emigrate to Egypt, he will have his full loyalty to Pharaoh.

Therefore, Pharaoh not only permitted Jacob and his sons to come to Egypt, but commanded Joseph to arrange that: *ואמר לו...*

Thus, in next week's Sidra, Joseph and the brothers leave to bury Jacob, we read: *ויהי כאשר יצא ישראל ממצרים ויבקרם עשרה בארץ גושן*. They had to leave their children as hostages!

Now we can appreciate what the *מגן חכמה* says on the words in today's Sidra: *כי פי המדבר אלעזר*, about which the Rabbis comment: *הקידש בלשון הקודש*. So what? Every diplomat must speak some foreign language of the neighboring country?

However, Joseph suspected that they were wondering at his actions: Why bother their old father to come to Egypt, why not send food and provisions to him for the rest of his life in Canaan? Why does he not go to visit him there? Hence, Joseph's answer was given in a hint: Were I an Egyptian, I could do it with impunity. But you note *כי פי המדבר אלעזר*, *הקידש* -- I am a Jew, a Hebrew. And a Jew who rises in government often must be

more careful, less generous to Jews, and bend over backwards...

7. Dialogue between Pharaoh and Jacob: When Rabbi Aryeh Cohen, known as the *דברי אריה*, was accepted as a Rabbi in Metz, everyone was delighted because he was such a great scholar and a distinguished spiritual figure. But one thing bothered them: he was 70 years old when he accepted this rabbinical position, and he looked even older. When the Rabbi noticed what was happening, he told them the following: Why does Pharaoh ask Jacob how old he is? Is that not a question that one uses for a child, not an adult? Moreover, why did not Jacob answer simply: 130 years old. Why did he refer to them as the days of his wandering, as *ימי אגל*, and to the fact that his father was older when the latter died? The answer is that according to the Sages, as soon as Jacob came to Egypt, the famine was suspended, and by virtue of Jacob's presence the entire land of Egypt was blessed. This pleased Pharaoh no end. However when he met Jacob and saw how old and feeble he looked, he was worried that Jacob would not survive long, and therefore the blessing would be diminished and disappear. That is why he asked him how old he is. Jacob, wisely, understood the question, and answered with equal wisdom: Don't worry about my appearance. If I look old and wrinkled, it is because I have spent a life in wandering, in difficulty, in suffering. However, my father was 180 when he died, so I assume I have a good number of years left.

Similarly, said Rabbi Aryeh Cohen to his people, If I look even older than my years, it is because I have suffered a great deal because of wandering and poverty and ill health. But I hope to give you at least 20 years, God willing. And so it was.

Jacob is the symbol of the People of Israel, called after him. Especially at this critical juncture in history, we may seem weary, confused, despondent, worried. But don't worry: we shall survive, we shall live, we shall make it. As God told Jacob: *אני אהיה עמו*.