

# הַמִּתְחַלֵּץ THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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### JOSEPH REVEALS HIMSELF – A REBUKE FOR ALL THE GENERATIONS

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

**I**t is written, "Then Judah approached him and said, 'If you please, my lord'" (Genesis 44:18). Rabbi Yehudah says, "He approached to wage war against him"; Rabbi Nechemia says, "to make peace"; the Sages say, "to beg".

This means that Judah, in approaching Joseph, was ready for all eventualities. He was ready to fight against him, and it is certain that Judah put himself in danger before Joseph's soldiers and Egypt's army because he made himself Benjamin's guarantor, as it is written, "I will personally guarantee him; of my own hand you can demand him. If I do not bring him back to you and stand him before you, then I will have sinned to you for all time" (Genesis 43:9).

Everything that is mentioned in this section is astonishing, and we will attempt to clarify the questions that are raised by it.

1. The Sages say that when Joseph's envoy discovered the cup in Benjamin's sack, all the brothers began to strike him and to insult him by treating him as a thief, reminding him that his mother had stolen Laban's idols. Yet Benjamin proclaimed his innocence, so well in fact that his brothers understood that the cup found in his sack was a ploy. Yet if such were the case, why did Judah take an additional risk and put Benjamin's life in danger by returning to the city, to Joseph's place? He could have immediately sent Benjamin back to his father with all or some of the brothers and himself have gone back to Joseph alone – to face life or death – in the war that he declared against him. Having made himself a guarantor to his father, he returned to Egypt with the intention of making himself a slave. Regardless of the cost, he would not have allowed Benjamin to become a slave, as he told Joseph, "Now, therefore, please let you servant remain instead of the youth as a servant to my lord, and let the youth go up with his brothers" (Genesis 44:33). Why didn't he send Benjamin to his father right away? Why did he instead return with Benjamin to the city, to Joseph?

2. The brothers understood that Benjamin had not stolen the cup, and that Joseph simply wanted to provoke and make trouble with them. It was a difficult situation. They should have killed Joseph's envoy and continued on their way. The fact that they returned to the city indicates their weakness, their insecurity. They put Benjamin's life in danger, for were a conflict to erupt, could Benjamin not possibly die?

3. It must also be explained why, after Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and after he showed them that he was circumcised (Bereshith Rabba 93:8), his brothers "could not answer him, for they were terrified at his presence" (Genesis 45:3). Concerning this, in the Midrash the Sages have said, "Woe to us on the Day of Judgment, woe to us on the day of retribution" (Bereshith Rabba 93:10). In fact, aside from Benjamin, Joseph was the youngest of the brothers, and if they could not face his accusations, how much more will we have difficulty in facing our accusations on the Day of Judgment? This Midrash should be explained. Where in this passage is there an indication that Joseph criticized his brothers and accused them so that we could draw a lesson concerning the rebuke that will be leveled at us in the future? The verse simply says that in their astonishment they jumped back, and Joseph told them, "'Come near to me, please.' And they came near" (Genesis 45:4). From where do we know that he criticized them?

4. The Sages say, "When Joseph revealed himself and made himself known to his brothers, they wanted to kill him" (Tanhuma Vayigash 5). How is this possible? It is also said that when the brothers arrived in Egypt, they dispersed so as to look for Joseph throughout the country because they worried about his fate. Why then, having finally found him, would they want to kill him? Why did the Sages say that they wanted to kill him? The brothers took note of Joseph's courage (Bereshith Rabba 93:7). He was the governor of all Egypt, it was he who distributed grain to all the people (Genesis 42:6), all the Egyptians circumcised themselves at his command (Bereshith Rabbi 91:5), and he remained just and upright at the end of his life as he had at the very beginning of it, for "when he was a slave he feared G-d just as much as when he was king" (Tanhuma Nasso 28). If the brothers killed Joseph now, all of Egypt would have learned of this news, and it would have reached the ears of Jacob in Eretz Israel. What benefit could they have drawn from such a tragic event? How much more so since Jacob told them, "there is grain in Egypt" (Genesis 42:2), which the Sages have explained as follows: "It was revealed to him that his hope lay in Egypt, it being his son Joseph" (Bereshith Rabba 91:6). At present, the brothers understood that their father Jacob had spoken to them of Joseph. Is it not surprising that they now wanted to kill him? How could G-d have agreed to such a thing?

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To explain this entire section, we should understand that the Torah does not solely relate historical events or anecdotes, and the Zohar has already cursed those who believe that the Torah only recounts various facts (Zohar III:149b). Some accounts in the Torah are incomprehensible because we do not grasp their profound meaning, hidden in its words. We are only trying to understand them as is, on the surface. We should understand that all the accounts of the Torah, in their most minute detail, are directives and instructions for all time and for every situation in which a man can find himself, and he should draw lessons from them. The section before us also hides sublime things.

By the grace of the Supreme King, we shall in good taste explain the account of Joseph and his brothers, as it should be. The righteous Joseph told his brothers, “Do this and live. I fear G-d” (Genesis 42:18). It is surprising that in Egypt, in this country filled with idols and impurity and known for its debauchery (Shemot Rabba 1:22), one of its leaders should declare that he fears G-d. This is astonishing, for the fear of G-d is one of the foundations of the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, men who truly possessed this fear of G-d and who inculcated this fear in all hearts and brought people to submit themselves to G-d. And it was precisely there, in Egypt, a place where the fear of G-d was unknown, that the brothers discovered that there was a great and powerful king, kind towards all the peoples, who did not keep all his harvests solely for his own people, but who distributed them to all the lands, as it is written, “And all the earth came to Egypt” (Genesis 41:57). Jacob had the revelation that grain would be sold in Egypt, or in other words, he saw that an offshoot of his descendants was there, a man characterized by kindness and generosity. In fact, if these characteristics are found in Egypt, it is a sign that there exists in that land a person who has great trust in G-d, for he worries not only about his own country, but about every country touched by the famine.

In addition, the brothers could see that in Egypt, where there were many thieves, armed robbers, and extortionists, there were nevertheless honest people. When the brothers came to bring back the money that they had found in their sacks, they said, “When we arrived at the inn and opened our sacks, behold, each one’s money was in the mouth of his sack. It was our own money in its full amount, so we have brought it back in our hand. We have also brought other money down in our hand to buy food” (Genesis 43:21-23). The Egyptian replied to them, “Your payment has reached me” (v.23), meaning, “your payment has already entered into the state’s treasuries, and it is forbidden for us to receive another payment from you.” Was such a thing possible? The brothers were impressed, and they understood that the sovereign and governor of the country was in fact an upright man, holy and filled with the fear of G-d. This is why Judah did not fear to return to the city (which answers our first question), for he knew that the king of the land feared Heaven and therefore it would be possible to reach a compromise with him, without quarrel or dispute.

In digging ever deeper, we find other reasons that erased all fears from Judah’s heart, so well in fact that he agreed to return to the city, even with Benjamin. Joseph

asked his brothers, “Is your aged father of whom you spoke at peace?” (v.27). It is certain that one who asks such a question will allow himself to be cajoled and would accept a compromise in order not to cause pain to an old father. Moreover, Judah did not want to kill Judah’s envoy and return to his father in the land of Canaan because he did not want to profane G-d’s Name. If he had acted in such a way, everyone would see his actions as proof that they had stolen the cup. Moreover, the king (whom they didn’t know was Joseph) feared G-d. If he were to have learned that the sons of Jacob had done such a thing, he risked losing his fear of G-d by thinking in his heart, “If the sons of Jacob, who taught the fear of G-d, acted in such a way, it is because ‘there is no judge, and there is no justice’ ”(Shochar Tov 47:6). He would therefore conclude that all is permissible. Concerning such a situation, the Sages have said, “Sages, be careful with your words, for you may incur the penalty of exile and be banished to a place of evil waters [that is, where heresy is taught], and the disciples who follow you there will drink and die, and consequently the Name of Heaven will be desecrated” (Perkei Avoth 1:11). This means that others would arrive at conclusions that were not in conformity with the truth. Judah therefore took the trouble to return to Joseph, and not to kill the envoy (which answers our second question), in order not to cause Joseph to have doubts about G-d.

This is the sense of the phrase, “then Judah approached him.” He approached him to wage war against him – the war of the Torah – in order to publicly sanctify the Name of G-d, and he returned to Joseph with Benjamin and all his brothers in order to justify himself before Joseph, whom Judah considered to be a G-d fearing man. Such was the path of Judah, who admitted his own faults (Sotah 7b). He didn’t think for a single moment that in returning to Joseph, he would wage actual war against him. In arriving before him Judah said, “I have come with my brother Benjamin and I didn’t escape to my father in Canaan because ‘your servant took responsibility for the youth from my father’ [Genesis 44:32].” The Hebrew word for “took responsibility” is ???, and it is formed from the same letters as the word ??? (“foolish”), meaning that if Judah had fled, or if he had killed the envoy, he would have profaned G-d’s Name by such a foolish act. Because of him, Joseph would have come to doubt G-d’s existence. This is why Judah took the risk of openly returning to Joseph, a man who was “equal to Pharaoh,” although Pharaoh did not fear G-d or believe in Him. Judah did all this in order so as not to profane G-d’s name.

Judah’s virtue was that he recognized his faults. The cup being found in Benjamin’s sack, Judah should have recognized that Benjamin was, apparently, the thief. He could not deny this evidence. In fact, Judah went back to Egypt. He presented himself to Joseph with Benjamin and admitted to the accusation so as not to cause a desecration of G-d’s Name. He acted in the same way with Tamar, his daughter-in-law, when he publicly admitted, “She is more righteous than I” (Genesis 38:26).

## THE MORAL OF THE STORY

### *From the Maggid of Dubno*

**I**t is written, “And his brothers could not answer him, for they were terrified at his presence” (Genesis 45:3). The Midrash states: Abba Cohen Bardela said, “Woe to us on the Day of Judgment, woe to us on the day of retribution. Balaam, the wisest man the nations have ever known, had nothing with which to answer the rebukes of his donkey. Joseph was the youngest, and his brothers had nothing with which to answer his criticisms, as it is written, ‘And his brothers could not answer him, for they were terrified at his presence.’ When Hashem will come and reprimand each of us, how much more will we be silent!”

It seems that the Sages wanted to evoke the idea brought across by the verse that states, “A man’s way is upright in his eyes” (Proverbs 21:2). This can be illustrated by the following parable.

Surrounded by his wife and children, a man calculated the amount that he owed in city taxes. Each time that he could, he put aside some money for paying this debt, but the amount that he put away was less than what he actually owed. The thought in the back of his mind was that he could present such good excuses and evasive answers to the tax collector that he would be satisfied with the amount that the man would give. If the man’s wife and children dared to contradict his way of doing things, he would get angry and say to them, “You’re doing everything against my interests. You’re looking to harm me!” However, when the man presented himself before the governor of the city, he stood in awe of his majestic presence and was intimidated by all the great men that surrounded him. He was seized with fright and felt incapable of saying anything other than the strict truth.

Inflated with pride, the wicked sit serenely enthroned in their homes, replete with falsehood, pretexts, and fabrication. They claim that bad is good and good is bad. However, when they will stand before the throne of justice, they will be taken with fright, and neither their mouths nor their hearts will anymore dare to give themselves over to false excuses. Conscious of the truth, they will then understand all the implications of their behavior. The best proof of this is found in

the story of Joseph. For not even a minute did he imagine that his brothers had deliberately plotted against him through wickedness. His brothers thought that they had very serious reasons to act as they did, as they sought only the good. And yet, it only required that they find themselves confronted by him for their arguments to crumble in an instant.

The text testifies to this: “his brothers could not answer him.” They no longer felt capable of claiming that they were right, “for they were terrified at his presence” and had forgotten what they thought they would say. If a confrontation with the truth has this effect, “Woe to us on the Day of Judgment, woe to us on the day of retribution.”

### THE PATH OF THE JUST PRIDE – PART III

Our Sages say that every proud person is comparable to an idol, for the verse says, “Every haughty heart is the abomination of the L-RD” (Proverbs 16:5) and another verse uses the same expression for the subject of idolatry: “You shall not bring an abomination into your home” (Deuteronomy 7:26). Some say that pride is comparable to transgressing sexual prohibitions, while others say that it is similar to the building of an altar for idolatry. Our Sages also teach that every haughty person finishes by being diminished, as it is written, “They are exalted briefly, and then they are gone” (Job 24:24). One must cut down a proud man as one cuts down a tree planted for idolatry, as it is written, “those of lofty stature will be severed, and the haughty ones brought low” (Isaiah 10:33). The remains of the arrogant will not be resurrected and the Spirit of Hashem laments over him. Hashem says, “He and I cannot live reside in this world,” as it is written, “one with haughty eyes and an expansive heart, him I cannot bear” (Psalms 101:5). Even a proud man’s family does not accept him, as it is written, “he is an arrogant man and does not stay at home” (Habakkuk 2:5).

## IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM THE MAHARSHAM

**R**abbi Shalom Mordechai Hacoen Schwadron was born in 1835 (5595) and passed away in Berzhan in 1911 (5671). He was among the greatest and most renowned figures of his era. He was known in all the Jewish communities of the world by his numerous works: Da'at HaTorah on the Shulchan Aruch sections of Orah Haim and Yoreh Deah, nine volumes of responsum, Mishpat Shalom on the laws of neighboring, Gilui Da'at on the laws of Shechita and unclean animals, and Techelet Mordechai on the Torah.

The Maharsham was the Rav of the towns of Potok, Jolti, Yoslovitch, and Butchotch, but his renown came primarily from his activities in his last position, in Berzhan, where he stayed for more than 30 years as Rav and director of two flourishing yeshivas that he had established there, Da'at Torah and Tushiah.

The Maharsham was among the greatest authorities of his generation. In the nine volumes of his responsum, one finds more than 3,700 entries, notable for their judicious insight, their impeccable order, the clarity of their exposition, the precision of each detail, and above all by an extraordinary encyclopedic scope.

In his Halachic responses, he also brings precise proofs taken from Biblical passages, Midrashim, and other sources. In one question on the laws of Shechita, he brings an argument from an explanation of Rashi on, of all places, the Book of Job!

This phenomenal scholarship aroused utter astonishment from all the greats of the world. The Ridbaz (the Rav of Slotzk) perfectly expressed this admiration in saying, "We also know how to respond when asked a question, but to find in every question the essential issue and the analogous example that brilliantly clarifies the point in question, the Rav of Berzhan does so to perfection and with great originality, and in this he is unique."

His extraordinary greatness in Torah is well illustrated by the following example. Rabbi Meir of Lublin recounted that in the Maharsham's old age, when he was already sick and no longer left his home, several of the town's important Talmidei Chachamim assembled by the door of his house. There, they began a discussion of Halachah among themselves. The noise of their conversation reached all the way to the Maharsham's room, and so he called Rabbi Meir, who was a member of his family, and asked him what Halachah they were speaking about outside. Rabbi Meir responded, "A Halachah on the parts reserved for the Kohanim." The Maharsham straight away replied, "This is specifically dealt with in Darchei Moshe, on the Halachot for a Mezuzah, chapter [such and such], paragraph [such and such]." He asked that the Tur be brought to him, and he immediately pointed out the place where the subject was found.

To Rabbi Meir's astonishment, the Maharsham showed him what he himself had written in the margin of the Tur: "Today, on [such and such a date], I have completed the Tur for the hundredth and first time." The Maharsham added, "The person who studies one hundred and one times, it is not surprising that he remembers a particular section of Darchei Moshe."

The greatness and holiness of the Maharsham were also demonstrated during his final hours, at a time when one of the members of his household spoke to him, offering a bit of wine to strengthen him. The Maharsham replied, "It is an explicit Halachah that a man who had drunk wine cannot teach, and I am now preparing the first discourse that I shall have to give before the Heavenly Court."