

# BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

*I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger... John 6:35*

---

## GENESIS 42-43

### Joseph's Brothers come to Egypt

*Then the seven years of plenty had ended, and the seven years of famine had begun, until even the people of Egypt cried out to Pharaoh for bread and were told: "Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do." Joseph opened all the storehouses and all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all lands.*

#### CHAPTER 42 – *'that we may live and not die.'*

On two successive occasions—here and in 43:2—Jacob insists that his sons go down to Egypt. He says, in effect, "Don't just stand there looking at each other. Why should you stand out?" *And he said, "Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die."* Thus, all ten of the brothers went to Egypt, unanimous in their purpose to "buy grain", but Jacob did not send Benjamin for fear of what might happen to him.

Gen 42:6-8 *Now Joseph was governor over the land; and it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him with their faces to the earth. Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but **he acted as a stranger to them** and spoke roughly to them. Then he said to them, "Where do you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan to buy food." So **Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him.***

There is something familiar about this situation. Once more, we have the motif of the well-known but "unrecognized" one. We have seen this on three occasions before in the Torah: 1) Jacob standing before his father, Isaac, claiming to be Esau; 2) Leah replacing Rachel on Jacob's wedding night; 3) Tamar posing as a veiled prostitute to Judah. Now we see Joseph deliberately hiding his true identity from his brothers in Egypt. He now bears no resemblance to the Hebrew shepherd; he speaks Egyptian, is dressed in an Egyptian ruler's robes, and he has an Egyptian name.

Four scenes, four disguises, four failures to see behind the mask. What do they have in common? Something very striking indeed. It is only by *not being recognized* that Jacob, Leah, Tamar and Joseph *can be recognized*, in the sense of attended, taken seriously, heeded. Isaac loves Esau, not Jacob; Jacob loves Rachel, not Leah; Judah thinks of only of his younger son, not the plight of Tamar; Joseph is hated by his brothers. Only when they appear as something or someone other than who they are, can they achieve what they seek – for Jacob, his father's blessing; for Leah, a husband; for Tamar, a son; for Joseph, the non-hostile attention of his brothers. ...Do the disguises work? ...though they may never win the affection of those from whom they seek it, God is with them. That, ultimately, is enough. ...We are not what others perceive us to be; we are what God knows us to be. "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).<sup>1</sup>

**Q. How can we equate Joseph's intentional hiding of his identity with the other three stories?**

**Q. Who else intentionally hid his true identity?<sup>2</sup>**

**Read 42:9-23** 9 *And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them – This tells us that it is out of this understanding that he acted as he did. And he said to them, "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land."*

---

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation*, p.297-8.

<sup>2</sup> See for example: Luke 24:15 and Mark 8:29-30.

**Q. As you read these verses, what questions do you have – what stands out for you?**

Joseph puts his brothers through the same situations in which they had placed him. His GOAL is to bring them to REPENTANCE over what they did to him. Their guilt is about to be brought to the surface in order to bring about true repentance BEFORE Joseph reveals his true identity to them. Repentance must come before redemption. We see Joseph putting his brothers through similar experiences to what they put him through. Let's look at the parallels:

Jacob sends the brothers on a mission He keeps his beloved son Benjamin home Joseph is harsh with them They are accused of spying Joseph throws them into jail Brothers recognized Joseph before he them Brothers are afraid of being taken into servitude	Jacob sent Joseph on a mission to his brothers His beloved son Joseph was lost on that mission They had been harsh with him They thought Joseph was spying on them Joseph was thrown into a pit Joseph recognizes his brothers before they him They sold Joseph into servitude
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

According to Jewish Law, *"He who kidnaps a man and sells him ... shall surely be put to death."* (Ex.21:16), so (although the Law had not yet been handed down) this is what they deserve.

Joseph's absolutely unequivocal demand is that they bring their younger brother Benjamin back with them. His plan immediately begins to take effect, as they link what is happening to them, with what they did to him. Guilt rises to the surface as they are faced with having to persuade their father to let go of Benjamin, after what happened to Joseph at their hands?

*v.24 And he turned himself away from them and wept. Then he returned to them again, and talked with them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.*

This shows us, the reader, just how deeply Joseph longed to reveal himself to his brothers, whilst on the surface he seems stern and unrelenting. Why was it Simeon who was chosen to be bound and kept in Egypt? The name Simeon means *'hearing'* ('because the LORD has **heard** that I am unloved'). He was was a ringleader in the Dinah incident (Gen 34:25,30). See also Is. 6:9; Mt.13:13; Mk.4:12

**Q. Can you see the significance of him being "bound before their eyes?"**

After loading their donkeys with grain the brothers departed for their return journey to Canaan. Weighing on them were the thoughts that they had to bear the news to their father that they had been treated harshly, seen Simeon bound and kept in Egypt and, worst of all, that they must take their young brother Benjamin with them on their return journey. If that were not enough, on the way back one of them made a disturbing discovery – his money was in his sack. Although, at this point, only one brother knew of his money being returned, verse 28b reveals their reaction: *'...and their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, 'What is this that God has done to us?'* Joseph's treatment of his brothers is having its desired effect – they are seeing that they are receiving Divine punishment for their treatment of Joseph — "As you sow, so shall you reap!"

*v.29 Then they went to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan and told him all that had happened to them...*

This time they are honest with their father—telling him everything. Then in verse 35, comes the second discovery: *"Behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack. They were terrified—fear and guilt rise up afresh. What bewilderment! Is he for us or against us? What does this mean?"*

**Q. What is Joseph's purpose in returning their money to them?**

*v.36 And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me: Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me."*

The firstborn son, Reuben makes an offer, (v37) but is immediately rebuffed by Jacob, saying, “My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he only is left . . .”

**Q. Why is Reuben’s offer unacceptable to Jacob?**

## CHAPTER 43 – Second Trip to Egypt

The brother’s second trip is quite detailed, taking up three chapters - again most of it taken up with dialogue. It begins with the words: *Now the famine was severe in the land*. There is no choice, they must return to Egypt, or die of hunger. The Hebrew word translated *famine*, actually means ‘hunger’. Ultimately, it points to a hunger for the Word of God.<sup>3</sup>

This time it is Judah who takes the lead role, reminding his father that, *“The man solemnly warned us, saying, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.’ He offers to stand as guarantee: And Judah said to Israel his father, “Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever.*

Judah effectively invites a curse on himself if he does not bring Benjamin safely back to his father. We can now begin to see why the Judah/Tamar incident needed to take place—Judah learned a good lesson there, and this time he is not wiping his hands of any responsibility, but he is making himself accountable – this time, he will not let his father down. The experience with Tamar forced Judah to face his own guilt, and importantly, to take hold of his true identity and place in the family of Jacob/Israel. The name Judah means ‘praise’ ‘thanksgiving’, but can also mean to ‘make confession’.

43:11 *And their father Israel said to them, “If it must be so, then do this: Take some of the best fruits of the land in your vessels and carry down a present for the man—a little balm and a little honey, spices and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds.*

Much can be taken from this verse—the Torah doesn’t give us details like this for no reason. Firstly, we should recall Gen. 37:25 *“...there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing **spices, balm, and myrrh**, on their way to carry them down to Egypt.”*

- 1) **Spices**—this Hebrew word occurs only twice in the bible—in these two verses—and comes from a root word meaning ‘broken’, ‘stricken’, wounded;
- 2) **Balm**—‘the balm of Gilead’ refers to healing. Jesus or the Holy Spirit are often said to be the true ‘Balm of Gilead’ that can restore the wounded soul;
- 3) **Myrrh**—was brought by the wise men as a gift to the Christ child; it was also offered to Jesus on the cross, *but he did not take it* (Mark 15:23). Myrrh produced insensibility. It is also a principal ingredient in the holy anointing oil.

The extra items in our current story are **honey**—the Promised Land is flowing with milk and honey; *Pleasant words are a honeycomb, Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones* (Prov.16:24); see also Song of Solomon 5; **pistachio nuts**—root meaning of this word speaks of the belly, or womb and speaks of being born; **almonds**—the almond tree is the first to ‘arouse and blossom from the sleep of winter’. The word used comes from a Hebrew root which means to awake, watch over, be alert, be steadfast’.

Taken together, this gives us a beautiful prophetic portrait of the death of Christ, and the abundant new life that will spring forth from that death to all who believe. These are the gifts from the ‘fruit of the land’, which, along with ‘double the money’ are sent by their father Israel as they return to Egypt, this time with Benjamin.

**Their father Israel** says, *Take your brother, and arise, return to the man. “May God Almighty (El Shaddai) grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.”* (compare with verse 36).

---

<sup>3</sup> See previous study, Amos 8:11.

Some other points to note and discuss in this chapter are:

- Jacob is now being referred to as “Israel”. As Israel, he relies on the providence of God.
- Joseph is referred to as “the man” 7 times in the first 14 verses. You may recall how Abraham’s servant was continually referred to as “the man” — a designation that points to ‘the man’ being a prophetic shadow. Paul speaks of the “one Mediator between God and man, **the man Christ Jesus**” (1 Tim 2:5). The brothers are also referred to as “the men” 5 times.

READ verses 15-23 — Joseph designates the “ruler of his house” (also subsequently referred to as “the man”), to mediate when he first sees the brothers approaching. The first thing they do is to plead innocence regarding the money they had found in the mouth of their sacks. v.23 *He replied, “Peace be with you, fear not. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money.” Then he brought Simeon out to them.*

This is an extraordinary verse. The man’s words indicate that he represents far more than simply the head of Joseph’s household.<sup>4</sup>

- The Hebrew word translated *treasure* (*matmown*) means a secret storehouse, hidden riches from a root word meaning ‘to hide by covering over’.  
*2Cor. 4:7 ...but we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*
- *I received your money*, or more literally, ‘your silver has come in to me’ —Silver represents *redemption*—a free gift, which cannot be bought or earned.  
*1 Pet. 1:18 knowing that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold, that you were redeemed from the futile ways ... but with the precious blood of Christ...*  
*Isaiah 52:3 ...you shall be redeemed without money.*
- He brought Simeon (*hearing*) out to them—Joseph isn’t even in the picture at this time. Does the release of Simeon indicate that their ears are now being opened?  
Ears can be blocked by guilt, selfish agenda, self-protection, pride, etc.  
*Go to this people and say, “you will keep on hearing, but will not understand”;* (Acts 28:26)

**Read verses 24-34** — There are some interesting details to observe in these verses.

- Joseph’s first concern is for the welfare of their father—we see this time and time again—and Joseph is eager to be assured that this is also important to his brothers.
- They *bowed and prostrated themselves*, thus fulfilling the first part of Joseph’s dream.
- Joseph says to Benjamin, ‘*God be gracious to you my son*’? (29)
- The presence of Benjamin so overwhelms Joseph’s emotions that he has to leave the room to weep in private, then, removing all signs of tears, he ‘restrains himself’—he cannot yet reveal his true identity.
- Why did the men look at one another in amazement? (33)
- The brothers are served from portions that had been set before Joseph.
- v.34 *Then he took servings to them from before him, but Benjamin’s serving was five times as much as any of theirs.* The number five speaks of ‘*grace*’, so Benjamin is seen to receive ‘*grace/favour*’. He is clearly seen to be favoured by Joseph, just as Joseph was seen to be favoured by his father. Another test - How will the brothers respond?
- *So they drank and were merry with him.* They did indeed pass the test for they drank and were ‘*intoxicated*’.

The brothers are no doubt relieved that their worst fears were unfounded, but as we know, the testing is not yet over. Joseph is still not yet ready to reveal his identity to his brothers—he has another surprise test in store for them!

---

<sup>4</sup> Like the un-named servant of Abraham in Genesis 24, the un-named head of Joseph’s household represents the Holy Spirit.