

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
New York School

INSTRUCTIONS TO LIBRARY

Statement  
by Referee

The Senior Thesis of Kenneth Alan Emert

Entitled: A Comparative Study of the Commentaries of  
Abravanel and Malbim to Genesis 37, 39-50

- 1) May (with revisions) be considered for publication ( ) ( ☒ )  
yes no
- 2) May be circulated ( ) ( ) ( ) ( )  
to faculty to students to alumni no restriction
- 3) May be consulted in Library only ( ☒ ) ( )  
by faculty by students  
( ) ( )  
by alumni no restriction

April 25, 1977  
(date)

[Signature]  
(signature of referee)

Statement  
by Author

I hereby give permission to the Library to circulate my thesis

( ) ( ☒ )  
yes no

The Library may sell positive microfilm copies of my thesis

( ) ( ☒ )  
yes no

3/25/77  
(date)

[Signature]  
(signature of author)

Library  
Record

The above-named thesis was microfilmed on \_\_\_\_\_

(date)

For the Library \_\_\_\_\_

(signature of staff member)

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE COMMENTARIES OF  
ABRAVANEL AND MALBIM TO  
GENESIS 37, 39-50

Kenneth Alan Emert

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
New York, N. Y.

Date: March 28, 1977

Referee: Dr. A. Stanley Dreyfus

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Felix Adler wrote, "To help one another is our wisdom, our renown, and our sweet consolation."

I wish to express my sincerest gratitude and appreciation to Dr. A. Stanley Dreyfus for his gracious assistance, guidance, and endless patience in helping to complete this work. Dr. Dreyfus has spent many hours reading, correcting and suggesting revisions of this manuscript.

I would also like to acknowledge Rabbis Arthur Schwartz and Jacob Friedman without whose help and encouragement I might not have reached this joyous occasion.

I also express appreciation to the many concerned individuals who encouraged me in the completion of this thesis.

Acharon Acharon Chaviv, my fullest appreciation to two wonderful women, Kathy Shapiro and Paula Eliscu who sat with me for hours reading, advising and typing the first draft of this thesis. These two wonderful people were always there when I needed them.

To Kathy and Paula I dedicate this work.

Baruch ata Adonai Elohaynu Melech Haolam Shehecheyanu V'keyemanu V'hegeanu Lazman Haze.

Kenneth Alan Emert

March 28, 1977

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	11
CHAPTER	
I. ABRAVANEL: A SHORT BIOGRAPHY.....	1
II. MALBIM: A SHORT BIOGRAPHY.....	5
III. ABRAVANEL: AN ANALYSIS OF HIS COMMENTARY.....	10
IV. MALBIM: AN ANALYSIS OF HIS COMMENTARY.....	24
V. ABRAVANEL: JACOB THE PHILOSOPHER.....	31
VI. MALBIM: JACOB THE RIGHTEOUS.....	37
VII. ABRAVANEL: JOSEPH THE LAD.....	41
VIII. MALBIM: JOSEPH THE LAD.....	46
IX. ABRAVANEL: THE BROTHERS.....	50
X. MALBIM: THE BROTHERS.....	54
XI. ABRAVANEL: THE POTIPHAR INCIDENT.....	58
XII. MALBIM: THE POTIPHAR INCIDENT.....	63
XIII. ABRAVANEL: DREAMS.....	69
XIV. MALBIM: DREAMS.....	75
XV. ABRAVANEL: JOSEPH THE PRIME MINISTER.....	86
XVI. MALBIM: JOSEPH THE PRIME MINISTER.....	102
XVII. ABRAVANEL: JOSEPH REVEALS HIS IDENTITY.....	118
XVIII. MALBIM: JOSEPH REVEALS HIS IDENTITY.....	124
XIX. ABRAVANEL: JACOB'S JOURNEY.....	130
XX. MALBIM: JACOB'S JOURNEY.....	136
XXI. ABRAVANEL: JACOB IN EGYPT.....	143
XXII. MALBIM: JACOB IN EGYPT.....	150
XXIII. ABRAVANEL: JACOB'S TESTAMENT.....	156
XXIV. MALBIM: JACOB'S TESTAMENT.....	165
NOTES.....	178
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	199



CHAPTER I

ABRAVANEL: A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Isaac ben Judah Abravanel was born in the Portuguese capital of Lisbon in the year 1437. Abravanel received the broadest and most enlightened education of his day. He mastered Jewish law, tradition, and a range of secular disciplines. Abravanel was among the first Jewish scholars to be familiar with Christian scholasticism and much of the Christian Renaissance.

Abravanel was an exegete, philosopher, and mystic as well a Renaissance historian and political analyst.<sup>1</sup>

Abravanel began his political career in Lisbon, succeeding his father as the Treasurer of King Alfonso V of Portugal. After an unsuccessful attempt by the nobles to overthrow João II, the successor of Alfonso V, Abravanel was forced to flee Lisbon as a suspected conspirator. He was sentenced to death in absentia in 1485.<sup>2</sup>

Abravanel believed that his misfortunes were the result of his having squandered his talents in the service of an earthly ruler. He therefore decided that only in the study of religious literature and the pursuit of the divine would his life really be fulfilled.<sup>3</sup> He began to write commentaries on the Bible. His first works included commentaries on the earlier prophets, who had been largely ignored by the earlier exegetes.<sup>4</sup>

In 1484 Abravanel began his career in the service of the Spanish King Ferdinand. He devoted eight years to Ferdinand and Isabella, acting as the royal financier. As a spokesman for the Spanish Jewish community, Abravanel tried unsucces-

3

fully to reverse the Expulsion Edict of 1492.<sup>5</sup>

Abravanel journeyed from Spain to Valencia and then to Naples. In 1494 he assumed a high position in the Neapolitan government of Ferrante I.<sup>6</sup>

During the time that he lived in Naples, Abravanel wrote commentaries on the major prophets, the Passover Haggadah, and Ethics of the Fathers. In addition, he refuted the ideas of Maimonides in a trilogy entitled Shamayim Hadashen, Rosh Amaneh and Mifalot Elohim.<sup>7</sup>

Abravanel's philosophy is not expounded in any single book. In order to gain an insight to Abravanel's philosophy one must piece together his concepts from his various writings. In his refutations of Maimonides, Abravanel propounded the theory that prophecy is superior to natural knowledge and is the result of God's miraculous creations. He taught that God controls history and intervenes in it repeatedly and that the purpose of history is the ultimate salvation of the righteous and the vindication of Judaism.<sup>8</sup>

Abravanel wrote a series of books aimed at demonstrating the imminent arrival of the Messiah. These books are known by the title Migdal Yeshuot (Tower of Salvation). The first of the series is entitled Mayenei ha-Yeshuah (Fountains of Salvation), a commentary on Daniel. The second book is called Yeshu'ot Meshiho (The Salvation of His Anointed) which is an interpretation of rabbinic dicta dealing with the coming of the Messiah. The third book, known as Mashmi'a Yeshu'ah (Announcing Salvation), is a commentary on the messianic

prophecies in the prophetic books.<sup>9</sup>

Abravanel understood that the state and its **monarchical** leaders were only a temporary necessity. His **Utopia** or ideal society would come about only with the advent of the **Messiah**. He felt that the best possible state had to serve the spiritual and political needs of its people. Until the **Messiah's** advent the secular governments would have to suffice.<sup>10</sup>

One of Abravanel's greatest achievements is his brilliant defense of Judaism against Christian claims that Jesus is the **Messiah**. Abravanel's exegesis gave strong support to the Jewish view.<sup>11</sup>

Abravanel will long be remembered as statesman, philosopher, and biblical exegete. But perhaps he will be remembered best for his loyalty to the Jewish people. Confronted with the temptation to remain a wealthy and honored aristocrat in Spain by accepting Catholicism, he chose to leave with his people in exile as a Jew.

CHAPTER II

MALBIM: A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Malbim (Meir Loeb ben Jehiel Michael), one of the greatest of modern Jewish exegetes, was born in Volochisk (Volhyna) in 1809.<sup>1</sup>

Malbim studied with some of the outstanding rabbis of his time. Both Rabbi Moses Leib Horowitz and Rabbi Hayim Auerback served as Malbim's mentors and teachers.<sup>2</sup>

In 1839, Malbim became rabbi of Wreschen (a district of Posen) where he stayed for seven years. By this time he had been accorded the appellation illui, genius, a title acquired during his sojourn in Warsaw.<sup>3</sup> In 1846, Malbim arrived in Kempen where he had difficulties with the non-traditional element of the community. After his short stay in Kempen, he was summoned by the Bucharest community to fill the position of chief rabbi of Rumania, which he accepted in 1858.<sup>4</sup>

Malbim, who was a staunch upholder of Jewish law, abhorred the Reformers' position in his community. Because of Malbim's inflexibility and uncompromising stand against Reform Judaism, he was faced with bitter opposition by the communal leadership which finally resulted in his imprisonment.<sup>5</sup> Intervention by Sir Moses Montefiore was necessary to effect his release. The Roumanian Government forced Malbim to leave Roumania permanently.<sup>6</sup>

Documents published by Moshe Rosen in his Hagut Ivrit be-Eirepa indicate that Malbim was accused by assimilated Jews within the community.<sup>7</sup> At a time when Jews sought to be part of the dominant secular culture, Malbim dared to denounce those Jews who did not adhere to the dietary laws.

Malbim's enemies considered his denunciations a public embarrassment which interfered with their acceptance into non-Jewish society. The controversy continued to escalate. The Roumanian Prime Minister denounced Malbim as ignorant and insolent because his position impeded social progress.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the Prime Minister refused to grant rights to the Jews of Bucharest. Malbim, dismayed by these accusations, appealed to the Turkish government to intervene on his behalf with the Roumanian authorities.<sup>9</sup> His efforts were futile.

After his expulsion, Malbim served the communities of Leczyca, Kherson, and Mogilev as rabbi for a short period of time.<sup>10</sup> Once again he met fierce opposition from assimilationists, and the Hasidim.<sup>11</sup>

Malbim is best known for his commentaries on the Bible. His first work, a commentary on the Book of Esther<sup>12</sup> appeared in 1845.<sup>12</sup> Most of Malbim's work was completed during 1867-1876. Parts of Malbim's biblical commentary were designed expressly to attack the Reform position.<sup>13</sup> In his introduction to the commentary Ha-Torah Vehamitzvah (1860) on the Book of Leviticus and the Sifra, Malbim refers to the Reform Synod at Brunswick in 1844, calling it a gathering of "rabbis and preachers as well as readers who butcher their communities."

Malbim understood that his commentaries had to strengthen the Neo-Orthodox position. He had to demonstrate the Reformers' ignorance of Hebrew and biblical exposition.

Malbim's commentary is a mixture of Halacha and Aggadah, with Kabbalistic mysticism, philosophic thought and moralism.



sermonizing.<sup>14</sup> Malbim believed that he was expounding the Scriptures according to the plain and simple Peshat.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, we find a comment in his introduction to Joshua that most of the earlier commentators, except for Abravanel, used the method of homily (Derash), but he stresses the simple meaning:

"I turned to the commentators but none of them bestirs himself to breathe the breath of life into the text according to the Peshat, except the Prince Isaac Abravanel and his land.... For this their commentators turn only to Derash with which we have had nothing to do."

Nevertheless, Malbim's explanations are often far removed from the simple, straightforward sense of the text. The same holds true with Isaac Abravanel whom Malbim admired so greatly.

Another important part of Malbim's commentary can be discerned in his distinguishing between apparent synonyms. Like Abravanel, he finds no redundancies in the Bible. Every word, every synonym has a specific, distinct meaning. Malbim is best known for his pilpulistic approach.<sup>16</sup> He often puts halachic discussions into the mouths of Biblical personalities. For example, in Genesis 37, Reuben brings back Joseph's coat of many colours as evidence of Joseph's death. Malbim interprets verse 34 as follows: "And Jacob tore his garments"—Midin Avel "that was because of the law of the mourner," "and he put sackcloth upon his loins"—"that was a sign of his repentance,



as it is written in the responsive collection of Rabbenu Nissim ben Reuben Gerondi that if one sends a messenger to a place of danger and he is harmed, the sender has to do repentance."

Another example of the "pilpul" style in Malbim's commentary is seen in the narrative of Jephtha and his daughter.<sup>17</sup> Jephtha vowed to sacrifice the first thing that came into his sight, after his military victory. His daughter was the first person to greet him. Malbim presents the situation as if both Jephtha and his daughter had a legal discussion as to the validity of Jephtha's vow:

"Jephtha held that there was a possibility of going back on his vow, but his daughter maintained there was no such possibility, and that a rabbinical authority had no power to uproot the vow..."

In addition to Malbim's contribution to biblical exegesis, he also wrote expositions of the Shulchan Aruch, entitled Arzot Hahayyim, Yalkut Shelomo, and Alm Literufah.<sup>18</sup> His collection of nine sermons entitled Arzot Hashalom, reveals the profundity of Malbim's homiletical ideas.<sup>19</sup>

Malbim died in Kiev on the morning of the first day of Rosh Hashanah, 1819.<sup>20</sup>

CHAPTER III

ABRAVANEL: AN ANALYSIS OF HIS COMMENTARY

In his commentary on Genesis chapters 37, 39-50, Abravanel undertakes to point out the following:

1. Apparent redundancies in the text;
2. Apparent textual inconsistencies and contradictions;
3. Apparent inconsistencies in behavior;
  - a. apparent inconsistencies in character and deed.
  - b. apparent inconsistencies in behavior and role.
4. Refutation of other commentators;
5. Resolution of philosophical problems in the text;
6. Logical fallacies.

A careful examination of Genesis 37, 39-50 suggests that Abravanel's greatest interest lies in the linguistic inconsistencies in the text. Most of his questions in these chapters deal with apparent faulty sentence structures, apparent redundancies and apparent textual inconsistencies.

The second greatest problem with which he deals is the apparent inconsistencies in the behavior of the characters. This is the focus of nineteen questions.

The third greatest concern of our commentator is to refute other exegetes. This occupies seventeen questions in his commentary.

Abravanel's questions on chapters 39 and 40 deal with redundancies in language which indicate apparent redundancies in meaning. The commentator regards scripture as the Word of God, and God does not repeat Himself unnecessarily. Each ap-

parent redundancy therefore has some meaning.

Why, asks Abravanel, is the word vayehi repeated three times in Genesis 37:27? <sup>1</sup>

In Genesis 39:4,6 it is twice stated that Potiphar put Joseph in charge of his household. There appears to be a redundancy in the text. <sup>2</sup>

Genesis 41:39,41,44 we find three separate statements by Pharaoh to Joseph. Why are they not all joined into a single discourse? <sup>3</sup>

In Genesis 47:29-30 Jacob commands Joseph to bury him. The text gives Jacob's command both in the affirmative and in the negative. Abravanel asks: Why is it necessary to use both the negative and the positive? <sup>4</sup>

Commenting on Genesis 48:15 Abravanel asks why Jacob refers first to God before whom his fathers walked; secondly, to God who has protected him; thirdly, to the angel who has redeemed him. <sup>5</sup> The repetition seems unnecessary.

In Genesis 49:1-2 Jacob calls his sons together for the purpose of speaking his final words to them.

The question raised by Abravanel is: Why are two terms meaning "to gather" used in these verses? Would it not have been sufficient to use one or the other term? <sup>6</sup>

We next consider some of the apparent textual inconsistencies which Abravanel finds in Genesis 37, 39-50.

Genesis 37:2 reads: "This is the line of Jacob." Abravanel's question is: Why then does the text speak of Judah, Tamar, Jacob's sons, Potiphar, and the butler? <sup>7</sup> It should have merely said:

"Jacob settled in the land where his father had resided, the land of Canaan. "At seventeen years old..."

The text promises one thing and mentions another; Abravanel views this as an inconsistency.

Genesis 37:2 tells us that Joseph at the age of seventeen tended the flocks with his brothers. How can the text say that Joseph was with his brothers when they were somewhere else?<sup>8</sup> They were in Shechem, while Joseph was in Canaan with his father until he sent Joseph to his brothers in Shechem. Abravanel sees this as an apparent textual inconsistency.

Genesis 40:5 reads: "Both of them, the cupbearer and the baker of the King of Egypt who were confined in the prison, dreamed in the same night each his own dream, and each dream with its own meaning."

Genesis 41:11, however reads: "We dreamt the same night, each of us a dream with a meaning of its own."

The question which Abravanel asks is: How many dreams were involved, one or two?<sup>9</sup> This appears to be a textual inconsistency.

In Genesis 46:31 Joseph informs his brothers of that which he plans to tell Pharaoh concerning their coming and settling in the land of Goshen. However, according to Genesis 47:1, when Joseph speaks to Pharaoh his words are not the same as those he had spoken to his brothers. Abravanel sees this to be an apparent textual inconsistency.

In Genesis 49:5-7 Jacob tells Simeon and Levi what the

14

future holds for them. They will be divided among the other tribes and will not have any inheritance in Israel.

According to what we know about the tribes, this prognostication by Jacob is inconsistent in that only the tribe of Levi did not have any inheritance in Israel.<sup>10</sup> However, it is not written anywhere that Simeon will be scattered and separated among the other tribes. Abravanel sees this to be an apparent contradiction to the Bible and to the reality of Jewish history.

A third major category deals with apparent inconsistencies in behavior. First, we shall consider apparent inconsistencies in character and deed, and secondly, we shall examine apparent inconsistencies in behavior and role.

In Genesis 37:2 Joseph is portrayed as a talebearer and slanderer. Abravanel asks: How can Jacob, who is supposed to be wise and righteous, love a son who does evil?<sup>11</sup> This is an apparent inconsistency in Jacob's behavior.

In Genesis 37:4 the brothers see the coat of many colors which their father has given to Joseph, and they become angry and jealous. Once again, Jacob appears to be creating strife. Why, asks Abravanel, did he not see that his making Joseph this coat would bring about strife and hatred on the part of his other children?<sup>12</sup> Did he not remember the quarrels between himself and Esau and the hatred which Esau felt for him?

In Genesis 44:10 Joseph tells the brothers that the one with whom the goblet shall be found will be his slave, and



the rest of them shall go free. However, in 44:16 Judah says to Joseph: "What can we say to my lord: How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered the crime of your servants. Here we are then, slaves of my lord, the rest of us as much as he in whose possession the goblet was found."

Abravanel sees this as an inconsistency in behavior. Why should Judah say that all of us will be your slaves, when Joseph had already stated to him that **only** the one with whom the goblet is found would be his slave?<sup>13</sup> It is unusual that an individual would want to inflict unnecessary pain and suffering upon himself and others.

In Genesis 45:12 Joseph reveals himself to his brothers: "You can see for yourselves, and my brother Benjamin for himself, that it is necessary to distinguish between the brothers' vision and that of Benjamin's?"<sup>34</sup> If all of them had the same vision, it appears to be an inconsistency in behavior.

We turn now to examples of apparent inconsistencies in character and deed. According to Genesis 37:12-14, after Joseph had told his dreams to his brothers, they go to Shechem to pasture their father's flock. When Jacob sees that all of his sons have gone to Shechem except for Joseph, he sends Joseph to his brothers. How could Jacob send Joseph to his brothers after he had just angered them? Why did Jacob not fear that the brothers would harm Joseph who he knew was hated by them?<sup>15</sup> There is an apparent inconsistency between

Jacob's character and his deed.

In Genesis 37:23-24 the brothers deal cruelly with Joseph and throw him into a pit. Why, asks Abravanel, after the Torah spells out the great cruelty and sin which the brothers committed, is no punishment meted out to them?<sup>16</sup> This appears to be an inconsistency in God, Himself.

In Genesis 42:7 Joseph disguises himself and behaves as a stranger to his brothers. Abravanel asks: Why does Joseph act in this manner? Why does he speak harshly with them? Is this not a transgression of the Law which forbids revenge?<sup>17</sup> Joseph who is supposed to be wise and righteous knows better.

In Genesis 42, the brothers come before Joseph to ask for food. He acts cruelly, though he knows that they came from afar, leaving their wives and children with very little food. He puts Simeon into jail, and causes their father additional pain. Why, asks Abravanel, does one who is wise act so cruelly?<sup>18</sup> This seems to show no sensitivity at all on Joseph's part; it is inconsistent with his character and deeds.

In Genesis 47:29 Jacob commands Joseph specifically to bury him with his fathers and not to bury him in Egypt. Abravanel asks: Why does Jacob command Joseph alone and not all of his sons together to bury him?<sup>19</sup> Does he not recall the jealousy and hatred which he caused by giving Joseph the coat of many colors? Why does he repeat this kind of behavior?



Three examples illustrate apparent inconsistencies in behavior and role.

In Genesis 37:4 the brothers realize that Joseph is Jacob's favorite, and they begin to hate him. There appears to be an inconsistency in behavior and role in that the brothers hate Joseph. If it were because Jacob loved Joseph more than the rest, they should have hated their father rather than Joseph who was the object of the father's affection.<sup>20</sup>

In Genesis 37:35 Jacob and the sons are in mourning for Joseph. Jacob refuses to be comforted. The problem here is how can the brothers comfort if they themselves are the mourners who are to be comforted?<sup>21</sup> It would make better sense for friends and enemies from outside to comfort Jacob. This seems to display an inconsistency in behavior and role.

In Genesis 43:29 Joseph finally sees Benjamin, his younger brother, and blesses him. The question arises: Why should Joseph bless Benjamin? Benjamin is only a few years younger than Joseph perhaps only five or six years in all. Besides, Benjamin already has ten children. Why does Joseph still call him the younger brother and bless him? Would not a greeting suffice?<sup>22</sup>

Our next major section will deal with Abravanel's refutation of other commentators. Abravanel has a deep reverence for the textual integrity of the Torah. A strict constructionist, he does not want to add nor subtract any words from the written text. Some exegetes suggest a rewording of the text, but not so Abravanel, who finds a way to understand the text without changing any of the grammatical structures.

In Genesis 37:2 there seems to be a logical inconsistency in the text. The text reads: "These are the generations of Jacob." All of the happenings speak only of Jacob's children and other episodes and about Jacob himself. Rashi suggests that the text be understood: *אלה הדורות אשר באו אל יעקב* meaning: These are the events which befell the generations of Jacob.<sup>23</sup> This interpretation Abravanel rejects. He also rejects Nachmanides' view that the word *דורות* refers to the generations of Joseph and his brothers to whom the following happened.<sup>24</sup> Abravanel says that we have another accounting of the relationship of the brothers who came down to Egypt in Genesis 44. Why would the text repeat it again?<sup>25</sup>

In the same verse the exegetes differ about the meaning of the word na'ar. Abravanel cites Rashi who says that Joseph would do childish things with his eyes.<sup>26</sup> Nachmanides says that he was with the children of the servants who were to watch over Joseph.<sup>27</sup> After all of these explanations, Abravanel simply states that Joseph was a young man.<sup>28</sup> He interprets the text literally.

In Genesis 48:6 Jacob blesses Joseph and his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim. Jacob tells Joseph that these two sons who were born to Joseph before Jacob's actual coming to Egypt shall be considered like the rest of Jacob's sons. He continues to say that these sons born to Joseph after Ephraim and Manasseh shall be Joseph's own sons and not Jacob's grandsons.

Abravanel asks: Since Joseph did not have any more sons,

what is the meaning of this section?<sup>29</sup> Nachmanides says that Joseph had other sons.<sup>30</sup> Abravanel rejects the suggestion of Nachmanides, for our exegete adheres strictly to the literal word of the text, and it is not stated elsewhere that Joseph had any more sons after Ephraim and Manasseh.

In Genesis 48:7 Jacob tells Joseph about his mother Rachel's having been buried in Bethlehem. Rashi says that the reason for this passage is to give an explanation for burying Rachel at Bethlehem and not in the Cave of Machpelah.<sup>31</sup> But Abravanel disagrees: If this were the case, it would have made more sense to say this at the same time that Jacob commanded Joseph about his burial and not in a narrative which speaks about Jacob's blessing Joseph's sons.<sup>32</sup>

In Genesis 42:9 Joseph's brothers come to Egypt requesting food and Joseph deals harshly with them. Abravanel asks: Why does the text read "the dreams which he dreamt about them," when they were about himself?<sup>33</sup> Nachmanides says that Joseph remembered the dreams and saw that they had not yet been fulfilled and therefore he tried to fulfill them.<sup>34</sup>

Abravanel writes that the fulfillment of the dreams was God's responsibility and not within the jurisdiction of Joseph. This is a very important refutation for in this theory we will see how Abravanel interprets dreams and the entire Joseph episode.

The next major category which illustrates Abravanel's style and form embraces questions of a philosophical nature.

Genesis 37, 23-29 speaks about the cruelty of the broth-

ers toward their brother Joseph. Abravanel asks: Why is no punishment meted out, or why do we not hear about the punishment which the brothers received for their actions?<sup>35</sup> The underlying question seems to be: If God is supposed to be a God of justice, then why does He not spell out the punishment for the brothers? Abraham questions God (Genesis 18:25). Will the judge of the world not do justice? This is the essential philosophical question! Where is God at a time like this?

Chapters 41 and 42 both speak of dreams. First we read of the dreams of the butler and the baker, then of Pharaoh's dream. Abravanel asks the philosophical question: Is there really any value to dreams? Are dreams just vanity and unreality or do they really have some significance?<sup>36</sup> Abravanel searches the traditional sources on this topic, Bible, Talmud, Midrash.

In Genesis 42:19 Joseph tests the brothers and tells them to bring Benjamin or he will consider them to be spies.

Once again in Genesis 44:2 Joseph tests the brothers by causing pain to Benjamin. The question posed by Abravanel is: After the first test involving Benjamin, why was it necessary for a second one? Was not the first test sufficient?<sup>37</sup> There are deeper problems underlying this: How long must one probe and wait before accepting and forgiving? In this case how long will it be until Joseph will accept his brothers as his own kindred?

The sixth and last major category embraces logical fal-

lacies.

In Genesis 42:53 we learn that the seven years of abundance that the land of Egypt had enjoyed came to an end. Then we read that the seven years of famine began and the people began to cry for food in the first year of this famine. The question is as follows:

- a. If the people know a famine is coming, they store food.
- b. During plentiful years there is a great supply.
- c. Joseph announces the famine will come just after the seven good years.
- d. During these seven good years there is a great surplus.
- e. People should have stored food from the surplus of seven years.
- f. This seven year surplus should have lasted at least three or four years.

If that is the case, why then do people cry out for food during the first year of the famine?<sup>38</sup> This is illogical, as Abravanel points out.

In Genesis 41:39-41 Pharaoh tells Joseph that there is no one wiser or more intelligent than he, because he is able to solve his dream. Why, asks Abravanel, does Pharaoh say: "There is none wiser and intelligent than you, and I will make you a master over my house," before seeing if what Joseph has predicted actually comes true?<sup>39</sup> Why should Pharaoh elevate Joseph from prisoner to ruler without waiting for actual



proof: This goes against logic and reason.

In Genesis 42:14-15 Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies. Then he tells them that they will be put to the test. If their younger brother does not come to Egypt, Joseph will consider them to be spies. Abravanel does not see how in bringing Benjamin proves whether or not they are spies.<sup>40</sup> There seems to be faulty logic and reasoning behind this assumption.

Genesis 42:3 tells us that all ten brothers went to Egypt to buy food. Abravanel questions the logic behind this action by Jacob. He needs food. He knows he can get it in Egypt. Therefore he sends his sons to get it. Why is it necessary for all of the ten brothers to go?<sup>41</sup> Why could not two or three brothers bring back food for all the family? There appears to be a logical inconsistency here in the text.

In Genesis 49 we find Jacob's testament to his sons. The first question which arises from this is: What was the purpose of these words? <sup>42</sup>

- a. Was it to bless the children?
- b. Was it to reprove them for their despicable deeds?
- c. Was it to inform them about the future of their offspring?
- d. Or was it to tell them about their inheritance in the chosen land?

1. If we say that these words were to be a blessing, that is, those spoken to Judah, Dan, Asher, and Joseph, then how

do we account for what was said to Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Gad, and Benjamin? Jacob's words to the latter group were not a blessing but a curse.

2. If we say that Jacob's words were to reprove the sons on account of their despicable deeds, as is the case with Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, and Benjamin, then how do we deal with what was said to Judah, Zebulun, Dan, Asher, Joseph, and Naphtali? For these were not words of reproach, but rather of blessing.

3. If we say that the purpose of the words is to speak of the future as indicated in the words spoken to Judah, Dan, Gad, Asher, and Benjamin, then how do we assay that which is spoken to Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Naphtali? These words do not speak of the future but rather of reproach.

4. If we say that Jacob's words are to inform the brothers of their inheritance as indicated by those directed to Judah and Zebulun, how do we deal with those words spoken to Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Naphtali, Joseph, and Benjamin which do not.

It is in keeping with Abravanel's deep faith in God that he chooses to conclude his commentary with a prayer. He asks God to assist him in completing the commentary for the remaining books of the Torah.

וְעַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַמְּשַׁלֵּם כְּכֹל הַדִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה  
 וְהַמְּשַׁלֵּם כְּכֹל הַדִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה  
 וְהַמְּשַׁלֵּם כְּכֹל הַדִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה  
 וְהַמְּשַׁלֵּם כְּכֹל הַדִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה  
 וְהַמְּשַׁלֵּם כְּכֹל הַדִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה

#### CHAPTER IV

MALBIM: AN ANALYSIS OF HIS COMMENTARY



Malbim places great emphasis upon matters of philology. Out of a total of thirty-six questions from chapter 37, 39-50, twenty-five are directly concerned with linguistics. The textual ambiguities and redundancies he finds in the text are the subject of fifteen questions. Secondly, Malbim devotes himself to differentiating between synonyms. Finally, Malbim undertakes to resolve seeming inconsistencies in the text. This is the subject of seven of the thirty-six questions.

Therefore, the first comparison which can be made is in the area of the exegetes' concentration. Malbim and Abravanel both deal with the problem of language in the text. Both are concerned with apparent redundancies and textual ambiguities. However, Abravanel's commentary suggests a division of six major categories while Malbim's commentary suggests a division of only three major categories.

Malbim does not focus upon apparent behavioral inconsistencies. He is not concerned with refuting other commentators' views by asking philosophical questions. These are an integral part of Abravanel's commentary.

Malbim's methodology is similar to Abravanel's in that his actual commentary is preceded by a list of questions. However, Malbim's questions are terse, concise, often fragmented, and frequently incomplete. His terseness is similar to the style of questions in the older rabbinic literature. On the other hand, Abravanel is verbose, but much clearer

in his presentation of questions.

Malbim does not present questions for each chapter. In fact, six out of our thirteen chapters are not preceded by questions. On the other hand, Abravanel offers a long list of questions before every chapter or major unit, except for Chapter 50.

Malbim divides his questions into sections covering a certain portion of the text. This is done rather arbitrarily. Abravanel, on the other hand, divides his questions according to the major themes in the narrative.

The next significant difference in style is that Malbim provides a running commentary on the biblical text. His method is similar to Rashi and the other early commentators. Abravanel bases his commentary on his questions. He poses questions raised by the biblical text and then answers his questions alone. He does not provide a running commentary.

Another difference between Malbim and Abravanel lies in their use of questions to introduce their comments. By numbering his questions, Abravanel helps the reader to understand the problems he sees in the text and to locate the answers. Often he restates the question in order to make his point clear. Occasionally, as in Chapter 41, he offers an explanation within a series of questions.

Malbim, on the other hand, puts his questions only once, assuming that the reader will grasp their significance without further help. He writes much more concisely than does

Abravanel. Unlike Abravanel, Malbim does not call attention in the course of his exposition to his having just given a response to a specific question he has put at the head of the chapter or section.

The following examples will serve to illustrate Malbim's form and style.

Genesis 37:1 records that Jacob settled in the land where his father had resided, the land of Canaan. Genesis 35:27 tells us that Jacob came to his father, Isaac at Mamre, at Kiriath-Arba near Hebron where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. Malbim asks why it is necessary to tell us that Jacob settled in the land in verse 2 of chapter 37 when the text never stated that he left for there.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the statement in 37:1 is superfluous and redundant.

Genesis 40:1-2 is repetitious. It first says the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt gave offense to their lord, the king of Egypt. Then it continues: "Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker." Malbim asks why each phrase must be repeated?<sup>2</sup>

Genesis 41:25 recounts that Joseph told Pharaoh that his dreams are one and the same; that God had told Pharaoh what He is about to do. In Genesis 41:28 we find the same idea employed in practically the same words. Malbim asks: "What is the reason for this duplication in language?"<sup>3</sup>

In Genesis 37:4,6,8 we are told that the brothers hated Joseph. Malbim asks why must this be stated three times, in

apparent redundancy. <sup>4</sup>

Genesis 41:55-56 informs us that the years of plenty have ended and that the seven years of famine have begun. Within the two verses, there are three statements which convey the same idea. Malbim questions the reason for this repetition.

The following examples illustrate what Malbim means by ambiguities in the text.

Genesis 37:2 describes Joseph at seventeen as na'ar with the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. The word is usually translated "lad." Malbim questions the precise meaning of the word. <sup>6</sup>

Genesis 40:5 tells us about the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker. Malbim regards the text as ambiguous. <sup>7</sup>

In Genesis 45:18-20 Pharaoh instructs Joseph what he is to tell his brothers about the wagons which Pharaoh is permitting them to use. However, directly after that, in Genesis 45:21, we are informed that the sons of Israel did so. Malbim asks: "What did they do?" <sup>8</sup> Again he finds the text ambiguous.

In Genesis 37:25 the text relates that the Midianites passed by and then states that the brothers sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites. After this, the text tells us that the Midianites bought him, and finally it states that Potiphar bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites. Malbim calls attention to the ambiguity. <sup>9</sup>

Malbim carefully differentiates between words which

are generally assumed to be synonyms. Examples are: In Genesis 37, verses 5 and 10, Malbim distinguishes between the words vayaged (v.5) and vayesapper(v.10), both of which mean "to tell." <sup>10</sup>

In Genesis 37:8 Malbim distinguishes between the verbs malach and marshal which both mean "to rule" or "to reign." <sup>11</sup>

In Genesis 39:8 Malbim makes a distinction between the roots ma'an which means "to refuse," and 'avah (in the negative) which means "not to desire." <sup>12</sup>

In Genesis 45:17 Malbim distinguishes between the verbs ta'an and 'amas, both of which mean "to load." <sup>13</sup>

In Genesis 42:25-27 Malbim distinguishes between two nouns sak and amtachat, both meaning "bag." <sup>14</sup>

Examples of the logical fallacies Malbim finds in the text follow.

According to Genesis 42:9, Joseph, remembering his dreams, charges that his brothers have come for the purpose of espionage. Malbim cannot see the connection between the recollection of the dreams and the accusation. <sup>15</sup>

According to Genesis 45:1-2, Joseph, unable to control himself, orders his attendants to leave the room. Malbim does not understand how the Egyptians could have heard Joseph's sobs if they were not present. <sup>16</sup>

According to Genesis 45:4-5, Joseph, having revealed himself to his brothers, tells them that he is the brother they had sold into slavery. He urges them not to be sorry because they are ultimately responsible for his situation.

Malbim finds this a contradiction.<sup>17</sup>

CHAPTER V

ABRAVANEL: JACOB THE PHILOSOPHER



In the Bible, Jacob is a nomad chieftain, son and grandson of a chieftain. His family and flocks are his chief delight and symbol of achievement. His struggles to the rank of chieftain are dramatic. Led on by a loving and scheming mother, he steals the birthright of his brother, a hunter and able fighter. Deceived by his father-in-law, he endures fourteen years of servitude in order to secure his true love. With the help of his Deity he, in turn, deceives his father-in-law and ends up with the majority of the wealth. His life is one struggle after another. Even in his old age, when he has settled down in Hebron, conflicts follow him. His sons clash with his favorite, Joseph, the son of his old age.

Yet through the commentary of Abravanel, Jacob is transformed. The primitive becomes the ideal man of the Medieval Age. He is a man searching for his God and his truth. He seeks to perpetuate a line of men struggling to live "the good life."

Jacob, according to Abravanel, is paralleled with his father Isaac to an amazing degree. This parallel hints at a basic rule of the universe according to traditional Jewish belief: "The deeds of the fathers are a sign of the children's fate." <sup>1</sup>

Just as Isaac suffered on account of his children, so Jacob suffers from the arguments of his children. <sup>2</sup> Moreover, the causes in both cases for the arguments is that the father prefers one child to the others. Isaac was prepared to bequeath all to Esau, his favorite, thus the the strife. By favoring Joseph, Jacob added fuel to the flames of jeal-



ousy.<sup>3</sup>

The parallel is continued in the suffering of the fathers. Isaac was separated from Jacob for twenty years while Jacob was in the house of Laban, and for an additional two years in Jacob's journeying back and forth, Jacob as the father is also separated from his son for a total of twenty-two years.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the commentator sees additional similarities in the last days of the patriarchs. Just as before his death Isaac witnessed the reconciliation of the brothers, so too Jacob in his last years witnessed the reunion and reconciliation of all his sons. In both cases, the sons bury their father.<sup>5</sup> This parallel, says Abravanel, is what is really meant in the following verse: And Jacob dwelt in the land of his fathers, sojourning in the land of Canaan.<sup>6</sup>

The text deliberately employs this wording in order to emphasize the direct relationship between the lives of Isaac and Jacob, Abravanel explains.

But just how is Jacob characterized aside from his life's having been a parallel to that of his father? He is portrayed not as a tribal chieftain, but rather as the "perfect man," seeking contentment, harmony, and wisdom.

Jacob chose to settle in the Land of Canaan, the land of his fathers, not out of a desire for wealth, but rather in order to occupy himself in the pursuit of knowledge just as his fathers did. As Abravanel terms it, the move was for the sake of immersing himself in wisdom *למנוחה בידע*.<sup>7</sup>

The move to Canaan was based upon a need to find a

place in which to worship God: a place wherein Jacob could devote himself to 'ה-מקדש<sup>8</sup> and not as one might assume from the Bible, to פליטת נפשו.<sup>9</sup>

As proof of this, Abravanel points out that Jacob chose Hebron as his place of residence. Now if Jacob's sons had to go to Shechem to pasture the herd, obviously, Hebron was not the ideal place for the promotion of everyday matters. It was, however, as Abravanel suggests, an ideal place to isolate oneself from everyday affairs and devote oneself to the study of divine matters. The choice of Hebron is seen by Abravanel as an indication that Jacob sought to withdraw from the world in order to pursue his knowledge of God. Rather than seek to increase his material riches Jacob sought "to know God," 'ה-מקדש.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, Jacob is not the sentimental old man portrayed in the Bible, doting after the son of his old age. Instead, Jacob is depicted by the commentator as the ideal Jew.

The opening lines of chapter 37 "These are the generations (or tales) of Jacob," are transformed into new devices by Abravanel. He suggests that 'ה-מקדש describes the greatness, the learning, the knowledge, and wisdom of Jacob.<sup>11</sup> Immediately following, Abravanel suggests that Jacob possessed intellectual perfection.

This formula indicates that Jacob was the very model of the "perfect man" according to the medieval philosophers. Moreover Jacob constantly taught Joseph and inculcated him

with qualities of knowledge, wisdom, and ethics.

Jacob, therefore, is presented as the mentor of a child prodigy in self-perfection. Abravanel suggests that Jacob was such an excellent mentor that he managed to pass on to his student this intellectual and moral perfection.

Therefore, while the Biblical text would suggest that Jacob loved Joseph simply because he was the son of his old age, Abravanel suggests that he loved Joseph because of Joseph's special qualities.<sup>12</sup> This is quite a different love than that portrayed in the Bible.

In line with this, Abravanel paints a very different picture of Jacob's gift to Joseph of a splendid coat. Jacob knew, suggests Abravanel, that a scholar should not wear dingy clothing of little worth. Therefore, a new coat was presented to Joseph as a symbol of his moral and intellectual achievement.

The very fact that Jacob sent Joseph after his brothers would seem to destroy Abravanel's image of Jacob the wise and the perfect. After all, did not Jacob know that the brothers harbored animosity towards Joseph on account of the coat? Nevertheless, Jacob held the rational belief that since Joseph had never done anything truly harmful towards his brothers, they would never harm him.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, suggests Abravanel, Jacob really feared for the brothers and not Joseph and therefore, he sent Joseph to watch over and protect them.<sup>14</sup>

Jacob's faith in Joseph's inviolability is again presented in Abravanel's comment on the story the brothers tell on their return to Canaan. Jacob cannot believe that God's

providence should fail Joseph. After all, how can such a fate befall a man possessing such intellectual superiority?<sup>15</sup>

Jacob is truly the philosopher: the good man understanding the hidden rules of God's universe.

Jacob is also portrayed as a man of sensitive feelings. When his son Joseph appears to have been killed, he mourns the loss of the son of his old age, and not Joseph the intellectual. Here Abravanel shows us the more human side of our character. On one hand the teacher has lost his best pupil, while the more human side a father has lost his son. The text says that Jacob refused to be consoled. Abravanel gives a reason for this by suggesting that Jacob could not understand why this had happened. It is against *Yoc* natural law, that the father should mourn for the son.<sup>17</sup>

Through Abravanel's commentary, a new character emerges out of the biblical tale of a tribal chieftain. Jacob the patriarch becomes Jacob the archetype philosopher. Eschewing material wealth, he isolates himself to study divine things. Seeing one of his children possessing the finest qualities of the "perfect man," he trains him in self-perfection. Believing his son to be lost, he mourns with all the natural sentiment of a father. And in his mourning, he struggles with the divine for after all how could such a thing happen according to his view of God and Man, and the rules of the universe?

CHAPTER VI

MALBIM: JACOB THE RIGHTEOUS

Malbim's portrayal of Jacob and Joseph differs significantly from Abravanel's. Though both tend to describe them as exemplary Jews, each uses his own standard. Abravanel, as previously noted, describes Jacob and Joseph according to the ideal of the Jews of Spain, that is to say, as philosophers. Malbim, however, depicts them more simply as good Jews, God-fearing, moral men faithful to their traditions and clinging to their God.

Jacob, for example, is described as having chosen Hebron as his permanent residence in order to be closer to his God and in order to maintain his link with his fathers.

Commenting on Genesis 37:1, Malbim explains that the word vayeshev indicates Jacob's fixed resolve never to move from Canaan, unless compelled by overwhelming forces. He is inflexible not, as Abravanel suggests, because he has found Canaan a safe refuge from worldly affairs, a place in which to further his sacred studies, but rather because this land is the land of his fathers (and the land designated for holiness and God's providence.<sup>1</sup>)

Genesis 37:3 reports that Israel loved Joseph more than his other children. Abravanel suggests that Jacob gave Joseph this affection because he saw in Joseph the same qualities that he, Jacob, had actualized to his fullest potential, knowledge, wisdom, and intellect.<sup>2</sup> Malbim disagrees, explaining the favoritism in closer agreement with the text: Joseph was the son of the father's old age.<sup>3</sup>

With regard to the coat of many colors, we see another



instance of disagreement between the two commentators. To Abravanel, the ornamented coat represents Joseph's intellectual attainments. A wise student requires a singularly fine garment.<sup>4</sup> To Malbim the coat does not represent intellectual attainment; it is given because Joseph is constantly in his father's presence, serving as secretary and agent, and it becomes a sign of Joseph's office.

The other brothers worked in the fields, where shepherds' garb was appropriate. But Joseph, being constantly in the presence of his father, could not appear in soiled, tattered garb. Therefore, says Malbim, in order to honor his father, Joseph required decent apparel. The coat therefore becomes a means for Joseph to fulfill the mitzvah of honoring parents. Jacob provided the coat so that his son could perform his religious obligations.<sup>5</sup>

Though Malbim does not stress the intellectual attainments of either Jacob or Joseph to the extent that Abravanel does, nevertheless he portrays them as having keen minds. For example, in Genesis 37:10 Jacob assuages the brothers' anger at Joseph's dreams by a clever ploy. He feigns anger. Jacob publicly disparaging the dream, in the hope that this would lessen the brothers' hatred of Joseph. Jacob demonstrates the fallacies of the dream. "Here is a thing (your rule over us) that is impossible on three counts. Is it possible that a father should bow down to his son? Could your mother, who is already dead, bow down to you? Can it be that your brothers who are greater and mightier than you should bow to you?"

All of this, the feigned anger, and the logical argument demonstrate Jacob's wisdom. After his display of feigned anger, Jacob ponders the dreams. This suggests, says Malbim, that Jacob recognizes these dreams as prophetic, for he understands the nature of prophetic dreams.<sup>6</sup>

Where Abravanel has described Jacob as a philosopher, retreating from the world in order to delve into sacred studies and perfect his moral and intellectual qualities, Malbim presents Jacob as the wise man.

One might suggest that the difference is crucial. To live up to the standards of Abravanel's Jacob, one must not only study his tradition but also philosophy and logic. One must retreat from the world in order to perfect one's qualities.

However, to live up to the standards of Malbim's Jacob is simpler. Love God, cling to the faith of your fathers, and seek wisdom.

## CHAPTER VII

ABRAVANEL: JOSEPH THE LAD

As previously noted in his interpretation of the text, the commentator often reworks the Bible. The Joseph of the Bible and the Joseph created in Abravanel's commentaries are quite different. The Bible relates the story of a young lad who, as the child of his father's old age, is singled out by his father for special attention. "Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic."<sup>1</sup> At seventeen, Joseph tended the flocks with his brothers, and brought to his father ~~bad~~, bad reports concerning his brothers. The special love which his father bestowed upon him, and his odious behavior to his brothers suggests a spoiled child. This seems to be the general intent of the biblical narrative. "And when his brothers say that their father loved him (i.e. Joseph) more than any of his brothers, they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him."<sup>2</sup>

The ultimate insult to his brothers was, of course, the telling of the dreams. Joseph dreamt that he would rule and that his father, mother, and brothers would bow in cowed obeisance.<sup>3</sup> The affronted brothers ask in anger, "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."<sup>4</sup>

The picture we receive from Abravanel is quite different. Joseph is not an indulged lad upon whom an aging and sentimental father dotes; Joseph instead, is the perfect man. He is singled out by his father because Jacob

perceives him to be like himself, an intelligent, moral, and sensitive soul.

Joseph, according to Abravanel, was exactly like his father in perfection, intellect, and knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Jacob, therefore, loved the lad more than the others because he saw the promise of his son. The father natured in his child all the potential qualities of the "good man." Jacob was constantly with his son Joseph, teaching him, and inculcating in him ethical living, knowledge, and wisdom.<sup>6</sup> Because of his innate qualities and his father's guidance, Joseph grew to become a young man perfect in intellect and qualities.<sup>7</sup>

According to Abravanel, the entire narrative tells us about Joseph's wisdom and his superiority in all his various endeavors.<sup>8</sup> The story is seen not so much as a history of Jewish origins, but rather as a morality play in which moral and philosophical lessons are imparted.

For example, the brief description of Joseph's job hints at his qualities. The verse "At seventeen years of age, Joseph tended the flocks with his brothers, as a helper to the sons of his father's wives," indicates Joseph's intelligence.

This brief statement, according to Abravanel, tells us of Joseph's genius and his moral qualities. Even though he was only seventeen years old, he understood shepherding better than his brothers. Therefore, he taught them the various aspects of their work.<sup>9</sup> He was so intelligent, says Abravanel, that without even venturing out with the

sheep he knew what they required. Furthermore, Joseph, the son of Jacob's wife, goes out to help the sons of the concubines. His conduct illustrates his moral qualities.

According to the exegete, he never boasted of his superior qualities of character and intellect. He was humble and courteous. When he had to help the sons of the concubines, he did not treat them as inferiors, but as equals, giving them honor and gentle assistance, guidance, and advice rather than harsh commands.

Abravanel sees Joseph's humility and courtesy as evidence of his intellectual perfection. That is to say, Joseph was the very model of a medieval philosopher and scholar.

How then are we to understand the report that Joseph carried tales of his brothers back to Jacob? According to Abravanel, the tale-bearer did not want to flaunt his own superiority. Indeed, it was to help raise the moral consciousness of his brothers. When he heard reports about his brothers in the market place and street, he would discuss them with his father. He did this in order to direct his brothers away from sin, for he wished them to be perfect in their qualities.<sup>10</sup> Far from despising his brothers, he did in fact love them and wished to correct their faults. This, says Abravanel, is a great virtue.

Moreover, in spite of the abuse he suffered from the brothers Joseph did not hate them. He would always greet



them even though they never answered him.<sup>11</sup> His recounting the dream should not be considered a boast, says Abravanel, but rather it should be regarded as Joseph's attempt to be forthright with his brothers. Only close friends ever reveal their dreams to one another. By sharing his dream, Joseph was saying, in effect, "I want to be your friend." He never interpreted the dream to them, but rather posed it as something to be shared between friends.

We see that the Joseph portrayed in the biblical narrative and the Joseph constructed by Abravanel are quite different. On one hand we find the spoiled child, doted upon by a sentimental father, a child who flaunted his privileges, boasted of his greatness and incurred the wrath of his siblings. Abravanel's creation is quite different. A young gentleman philosopher is tutored by his father in the path of self-perfection. Intelligent, moral, and compassionate, he is caring and gentle with all men. Scripture portrays the precocious and spoiled lad; the commentator, the model of the medieval philosopher.

CHAPTER VIII

MALBIM: JOSEPH THE LAD

In describing Joseph, Malbim does not overly exaggerate Joseph's intellectual attainments; instead, Malbim focuses on Joseph's moral superiority.

Joseph, as a youth, is, of course, intelligent. This is demonstrated in the verse *וְיִסְמְנוּ אֵת יוֹסֵף*.<sup>1</sup> Malbim suggests that this refers to Joseph's ability to teach his brothers how to best tend sheep. According to the Rabbis, Malbim informs us, this verse also implies that Jacob would act as a shepherd towards his brothers, showing the way of knowledge, reverence, and moral teaching.<sup>2</sup> This implies no pride or conceit on the part of Joseph, who, says Malbim was very modest. His instructing his brothers was motivated by sincere concern for their welfare.

Joseph's moral sensitivity is seen in his treatment of inferiors. In addition to the sons of Jacob's wives; Leah and Rachel, there were also sons from Jacob's union with his concubines Bilhah and Zilpah. The offspring of concubines were considered of that time socially inferior.<sup>3</sup>

Genesis 37:2 implies, says Malbim, that Joseph helped even the children of the concubines, in spite of their lowly status. He treated them as equals, although his other brothers would not do so.

In fact, according to Malbim, there was a constant feud between the sons of Jacob's wives and the sons of his concubines. The sons of Jacob's wives treated the others as slaves and disparaged them with all manner of slander. The concubines' sons retaliated by gossiping about Jacob's legal wives,

the mothers of their persecutors. These "facts," says Malbim, explains Genesis 37:2: "And Joseph brought an evil report of them unto their father." Joseph reported the feud back to his father, in order that Jacob, aware of the situation, would then be able to make peace between the two groups. Joseph made these reports not for self-aggrandisement, but only because he was prompted by a deep concern for truth and peace.<sup>4</sup>

Again, one might question Joseph's motives in relating his dreams. Malbim vindicates Joseph. We must understand, says Malbim, that Joseph was righteous, had a pure heart, and truly loved his brothers.<sup>5</sup> Joseph sought to share his first dream with his brothers only because it involved them. The use of the word vayomer in verse 6 suggests that Joseph first came to them and said to them, "This concerns you."<sup>6</sup> Joseph's use of the phrase shema' na, a favorite term of the prophets, was intended to inform his brothers that this dream was surely a prophecy sent by heaven.<sup>7</sup>

When the brothers became angry at Joseph because of his dream, he was shocked. Joseph later related the second dream because, since it was different and involved more than just the eleven, it might be taken as a nullification of the first dream.<sup>8</sup>

Malbim's portrayal of Joseph is significantly different from Abravanel's. Joseph's dynamic moral and intellectual striving seems absent. Abravanel sees Joseph as a young prodigy, who under the tutelage of his father and mentor studies vigorously to perfect himself. Malbim depicts Joseph

simply as a moral and sensitive youth who is trying his utmost to live ethically and spiritually in an environment of conflict.

CHAPTER IX

ABRAVANEL: THE BROTHERS



The villains in the story, if indeed there are any, are the brothers. Jealous of Joseph, they spurn him and go so far as to sell him into slavery.

Abravanel does not really alter the characters of the brothers. His aim is to make their thoughts and deeds congruent with their biblical image. He explains that they never really understood that Jacob favored Joseph because of Joseph's intellectual superiority.<sup>1</sup> They never understood the real reason (as Abravanel sees it) for Joseph's tale-bearing. Not recognizing that Joseph was, indeed, on a higher level than they, they begrudged him Jacob's favor. Moreover, they feared that only Joseph, by reason of his father's special love, would inherit all the wealth of the family. The coat, of course, became for them a symbol of Joseph's special favor. When Joseph told them his dreams, they did not see them as coming from God. As far as they were concerned, Joseph was speaking falsehoods.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore Abravanel, commenting upon Genesis 37:12, holds that the brothers wanted to remove themselves from Joseph, the source of their irritation. For that reason they chose to pasture in Shechem. There they would have no need to worry about Joseph, the talebearer.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, they would not have to endure the special honors given him.

But still another consideration underlay their journey. According to Abravanel, the brothers reasoned that Shechem was an ideal location in which to ambush Joseph. It had a reputation as a *ḥay ḥay*, a bloody city.<sup>4</sup> If they killed Joseph, they could blame the murder on their enemies who

surrounded the area. Thus, suggests Abravanel, their choice of Shechem was made in order to provide an alibi.

Scripture tells us that the brothers saw Joseph from afar. Before he had a chance to come close to them, they conspired to kill him. Abravanel tells us that the brothers wanted to remove Joseph from the world, and therefore devised all kinds of clever schemes to dispose of him. They wanted to free themselves of this lad's tyranny.<sup>5</sup> However, the brothers could not decide what was the most effective method to accomplish their scheme. Justifying what they were about to do, they maintained that Joseph really did not dream his dreams, but rather invented them out of arrogance and haughtiness.<sup>6</sup> In this way they relieve their consciences. They are portrayed both as murderers and liars, since they are ready to kill their brother and then deceive their father. On the other hand Reuben suggests that the dreams which the other brothers call arrogant might well be true dreams from God, and how can God's will be annulled? He admonishes the brothers for transgressing the will of God. But the brothers do not heed his advice. Portraying Reuben positively, Abravanel has him suggest that Joseph be hurled into an open pit. If Joseph's dreams are true, he will be saved from the pit by some great miracle. If the dreams are false, Joseph will soon die a distraught soul. After Reuben's plan is heeded, Judah sees a way of disposing of Joseph which will be easier upon the brothers' consciences. He proposes that the brothers sell Joseph to Ishmaelites from the area of Midian who chance

to be in the vicinity. According to Abravanel, Judah felt that keeping Joseph in the pit was equivalent to killing him, but that selling Joseph is a less heinous way of disposing of him. Judah asks his brothers what they will gain by killing Joseph. In addition to fratricide, the brothers will not gain materially by Joseph's death. Abravanel has Judah say: "If this was all God's providential plan, then He will rescue Joseph from this misfortune. But if Joseph's dreams are false, then his future will be changed from kingship and rule to degradation and servitude."<sup>7</sup>

It is clear to Abravanel that the brothers were not motivated by a desire for money, but by a desire to remove Joseph from their father's house.

In the Biblical text, Genesis 37:29-30, Reuben, returning to the pit and seeing that Joseph is gone, immediately thinks that the lad has been killed, and he tears his garments. Abravanel suggests that Reuben rents his garments because he feels that the brothers were murderers and that he, himself, is guiltless. He worries that if he returns in their company, they may decide on the spur of the moment to kill him.<sup>8</sup> How different this is from the Biblical version. In the latter, Reuben feels himself responsible for Joseph. According to the former, Reuben was concerned more for his own safety than for Joseph's.

## CHAPTER X

MALBIM: THE BROTHERS

Joseph's brothers were not perfect men. They were not so morally sensitive as Joseph. For example, they treated the sons of the concubines with unfounded contempt.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, they are constantly bitter toward Joseph, primarily because they fear that Jacob intends to select him as the heir, and give him both the final blessing and the birth-right.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, when Joseph brought his first dream to his brothers, they considered it another display of arrogance. However, they did possess some insight. The brothers recognized that there was an element of truth in the dream.<sup>3</sup> They therefore tried to negate it by showing its contradictions.

This is somewhat different from Abravanel's understanding of the incident. Abravanel does not consider that the brothers possess insight to recognize the dreams as valid. According to Malbim, the brothers eventually used the dream to support their fears that Jacob would name Joseph as his primary heir.<sup>4</sup> The brothers, unable to bear the presence of Joseph, whom they perceived as arrogant and threatening, did their best to get away from him.

Like Abravanel, Malbim suggests that the brothers went as far as to scheme to rid themselves of Joseph. This is intimated, says Malbim, in Genesis 37:12. Since Shechem was a dangerous place, filled with inhabitants hostile to Jacob and his family the father would not send Joseph to follow them there.<sup>5</sup> However, they also chose Shechem because they



realized that it would be the ideal locale in which to ambush Joseph, if that became desirable. Were Joseph to die in such an area, it could be explained to Jacob that the hostile inhabitants had killed him.<sup>6</sup> Shechem was itself a potential alibi. This, too, is similar to Abravanel's view.

When the brothers saw Joseph approaching they conspired against him. This suggests, says Malbim, that they saw not a brother coming to ascertain their welfare, but rather an arrogant rival coming to dominate them in the field.<sup>7</sup> Incensed and fretful lest Joseph rule over them for even a moment as he had dreamed, they agreed to kill him immediately. This, according to Malbim, is implied in the words *למה נאמר*.<sup>8</sup>

Yet not all of them were so impulsive. It was Reuben who sought to save Joseph. From the few words in Genesis 37:21, Malbim infers that Reuben wanted to save Joseph from any harm whatsoever.<sup>9</sup> However, the others rejected the ideal. They insisted that he be punished. Reuben then offered a compromise, says Malbim: "Let us not take his life."<sup>10 11</sup> Reuben thus suggested that they throw Joseph in a pit. In that way, his blood would not be on their hands.

Why do they remove Joseph's coat before they decide to use it as evidence of a tragic accident? Malbim suggests that the brothers tore off Joseph's coat because it was the most obvious symbol of all that angered them; Jacob's special love for Joseph.<sup>12</sup>

However, even the harsh idea of leaving Joseph to die



in the pit is forgotten when Judah suggests an alternative. "What profit is it if we slay our brother?" he asks.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, Malbim explains, Judah presents an argument to save Joseph. If the goal is merely to remove him, why not cause him to be sold into slavery?<sup>14</sup> So he suggests a plan. If they leave him in the pit, and the caravan of Ishmaelites pass by, they will sell him into slavery, as is their custom. Joseph's life is saved. Malbim takes special care to point out that the brothers never actually sold Joseph; rather they caused him to be sold: a significant difference.

And that is what is meant, says Malbim, by the use of the form nimkevernu in Genesis 37:27. All of these actions on the part of the brothers are not due solely to what appears to be impulsive jealousy. Certainly, as they are described by Malbim, they appear to be men of fiery temper and almost uncontrollable emotions. Yet all of this is God's providence. It is no coincidence that the passing caravan which purchases Joseph is on its way to Egypt. This is the way God works in order to fulfill His designs. And so, Malbim says on Genesis 37:12, everything that happened, the coat of many colors, the telling of the dreams, the brothers' bitter jealousy, and even their selling of Joseph was not accidental. All of it was planned and executed by the hand of Heaven.

CHAPTER XI

ABRAVANEL: THE POTIPHAR INCIDENT

According to the biblical narrative, the Midianites are responsible for selling Joseph to Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh.<sup>1</sup> Abravanel sees this phenomenon in an entirely different perspective. He says that because of God's Providence Joseph entered the service of Potiphar, the chief of all the stewards. Joseph was always a perfect servant *וְיֹסֵף עָבַד אֶת אֲדֹנָיו*. In everything he did, he feared God and always considered His demands. Because of his obedience, and faithfulness to his Deity, God made Joseph to succeed.<sup>2</sup> The fact that Joseph is put in charge of Potiphar's household indicates to Abravanel that Joseph was not a true slave in the literal sense of the word. Unlike the other servants, he did not have to work in the field. Before this time, he was not permitted to enter the house proper, but now he would be dressing Potiphar, feeding him, and, most important, handling his wealth and treasures.

Joseph has attained such a high position that he does not even have to account for Potiphar's property. Potiphar trusts him so much that he takes it for granted that Joseph would be honest in all of his dealings. Here Abravanel goes further than the biblical narrative.

Abravanel tells us that Joseph was such a God-fearing man that he would not cheat or exploit others for self-gain. He could have profited so much more by engaging in unethical behavior. For his reverence of God, Joseph received the reward of God's continuous **providence.**

Abravanel points out how outstanding Joseph is by way of introduction to his encounter with Potiphar's wife.

According to the biblical narrative, Potiphar's wife tries to seduce Joseph and Joseph refuses. Joseph, according to Abravanel, sees this as an act of rebellion, as an unlawful act. Abravanel makes Joseph protest that, even if Potiphar would not find out, God, who knows all secrets, would count it a sin. Abravanel insists that Joseph answered his master's wife the first time only out of respect for Potiphar. The wise and perfect Joseph realizes that he is human and open to temptation, knows that the woman would continue to lead him astray. He is aware that her persistence could sway him, and therefore, wisely, he decides not to answer her when she speaks to him day after day. Abravanel mentions that the rabbis said that she tried to seduce him for twelve months and he never responded. It was the custom of women in those days to sit on a fine linen couch on the earth. The chiefs would recline on the couch in order to converse. One day Potiphar's wife told Joseph to lie down on the couch near her, so that she could speak with him. He did not want to be close to her. This is what the meaning of Genesis 39:10: he did not yield to her request to be beside her, to be with her. When she saw that Joseph was not paying any attention to her, her passion for him became so intense that she could not control herself. She caught his clothes, hoping that he might be shamed into lying with her. But Joseph fled from her in order that she might not embrace him. The text says that Joseph left his coat in her hand and fled outside. Ever a perfect gentleman, Joseph did not wrest his clothes from

her, for she was his master's wife and he had respect for his master. Once again, Joseph's true character is apparent. He is such a "perfect man" that even when he rightfully should have seized his clothing from her, he was too mannerly to do so. According to Abravanel, Potiphar's wife hastened to tell her husband of the incident in order to render Joseph's account false. She had to make it seem as if he had tried to rape her. Therefore, she says, in effect: "This is what you bring home, a servant who watches over your house and trifles with your wife."

Abravanel says that Potiphar really did not believe his wife's story, for if he had, he would have killed Joseph. Instead, he puts Joseph into jail. This suggests Abravanel, is done to satisfy the wife, for had Potiphar not done something, he would have been despised by his wife forever.<sup>3</sup> In addition, he would be giving his wife license to commit adultery. If Potiphar had been truly angry, he would have delivered Joseph to his guards to be thrown into jail, as was the custom in those days, in order to shame the criminal. However, since Potiphar himself escorted Joseph to the jail, he demonstrated that he still held Joseph in high esteem. Moreover, Potiphar put Joseph in a place where prisoners of the king were incarcerated and not in a place where the less important prisoners were kept. Therefore, the only punishment which Joseph received was that he had to remain in jail for a period.

To sum up, we see in Joseph the attributes of a perfect man, a man who fears his Maker, acts justly, and has

a fine sense of right and wrong. This becomes apparent to us through Abravanel's embellishment of the text.



CHAPTER XII

MALBIM: THE POTIPHAR INCIDENT

Before we discuss the Potiphar incident, we shall consider the developments preceding Joseph's actual arrival in Egypt. The brothers had planned to kill Joseph until Reuben and Judah interceded. According to Malbim, Judah asks: What will we gain by killing a human being? Since it is our sole desire to remove Joseph as far as possible from our father's house so that he will not be able to rule over us, we will be able to achieve our goal by selling him to the Ishmaelites. Judah reasoned that if they were to place him into a pit, the Ishmaelites would understand this to signify that Joseph was guilty of a capital crime and thus deserving of death. The Ishmaelites, in turn, would remove Joseph from the pit and take him as a slave as was customary in those days. Therefore, Joseph would become a slave without the brothers themselves having sold him. All that they did was to cast him into a hole to await the notice of the Ishmaelites.<sup>1</sup>

Malbim asks: Why does the text say that first the Ishmaelites passed and then the Midianites? Subsequently we are told that the Ishmaelites sold Joseph; then that the Midianites sold Joseph, and finally that Potiphar bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites. How can these difficulties be reconciled?<sup>2</sup> Malbim answers that while the brothers were waiting for the Ishmaelites to arrive, the Midianites came to the pit. The Midianites then raised Joseph and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty silver coins. The Ishmaelites then brought Joseph to Egypt.<sup>3</sup>

Both Abravanel and Malbim agree that it was by divine

providence that Joseph entered Potiphar's service. It was God's will that Potiphar buy Joseph and that Joseph eventually rise to great heights.<sup>4</sup>

Malbim points out that Joseph was not only successful because of divine providence, but also because he possessed a natural inclination toward success. Malbim explains these two manifestations of the same attributes in the following manner: A natural inclination toward success is manifest when one does business. Success by the help of Providence becomes evident when one undertakes an enterprise which of itself must fail, but which through divine intervention succeeds. In other words, if one made the wrong decision in business, and divine providence were operative, the decision would not prove detrimental.<sup>5</sup> Abravanel does not present this concept. He takes Genesis 39:2 to signify that Joseph was successful only because of God's help.

According to Malbim, Potiphar was impressed with the obvious fact that Joseph enjoyed the help of providence in all his undertakings and especially those which were likely to prove unsuccessful. As a result Potiphar came to admire Joseph very much, Potiphar lessened his burden by making Joseph his personal servant.<sup>6</sup>

It was the custom to appoint two people to be in charge of domestic finances. One took charge of incoming monies and the other person of outgoing funds. This protected the owner against theft. But, because Potiphar trusted Joseph completely, he gave him complete charge of his finances.<sup>7</sup>

Malbim explains Genesis 39:5: Everything at first glance seemed to belong to Joseph. Therefore, when God blessed Potiphar's house, he was blessing what appeared to be Joseph's house. Both Abravanel and Malbim agree that God's providence was centered on Joseph. Abravanel comments that this narrative is intended to demonstrate how outstanding Joseph actually is. This interpretation must precede Abravanel's analysis of the central episode of Chapter 37.<sup>8</sup>

Malbim, on the other hand, emphasizes God's continuous providence on Joseph's behalf. Malbim sees Genesis 39:7 as the introduction to the seduction story. Potiphar's wife did not at first think of committing adultery with a mere slave. But when she saw that he was highly respected by her husband, she began to look at Joseph seriously. On commenting on Genesis 39:8, Malbim observes the word me'en indicates that Joseph refused verbally to be seduced by Potiphar's wife, yet, deep in his heart, Joseph really wanted to submit. However, he succeeded in conquering his evil inclination, and did not succumb to her overtures. This is entirely different from Abravanel's treatment of the same material. According to Abravanel, Joseph did not desire Potiphar's wife.<sup>9</sup>

According to Malbim, one day the wife requested that Joseph lie with her not for the purpose of adultery, but simply in order to have him with her in the house. Joseph refused. After this occurrence, Joseph was careful not to enter into the inner house at all. One day, upon reporting

for work, he was surprised that the other members of the staff were nowhere to be found. Malbim quotes Rabbi Judah<sup>10</sup> who says that the staff was celebrating a holiday. Taking advantage of their being alone, Potiphar's wife seized Joseph by his coat. Joseph fled, leaving his coat behind. Now Potiphar's wife could claim that Joseph had entered the house for the purpose of seducing her. When he had removed his clothing, she screamed. She claimed that he left her on the bed. This is precisely what she told Potiphar.<sup>11</sup>

Abravanel presents the details of the incident quite differently (see chapter 4 of Abravanel). Both insist that Potiphar did not believe his wife. Malbim says that Potiphar knew that his servant would not be foolish enough to risk the consequences of such an act. Potiphar was furious but not with Joseph; he was angered by the entire incident.<sup>12</sup> Both Malbim and Abravanel say that if Potiphar had been angry with Joseph, he would have killed him immediately. According to Malbim, Potiphar could not keep Joseph in his house anymore. Abravanel suggests that Potiphar removed Joseph from his house in order to satisfy his wife. If he took no action, he would have incurred her contempt forever. In addition, he would be giving his wife license to commit adultery.<sup>13</sup>

Both Malbim and Abravanel explain that to demonstrate Joseph's innocence Potiphar personally conducted Joseph to prison.

Malbim observes that it is clear that Joseph was free

to do his work while he was in prison, because Potiphar was in charge of the prison and he required assistance. Joseph was made administrator or warden of the jail.<sup>14</sup> Abravanel sees Joseph as a prisoner;<sup>15</sup> Malbim sees him as an official, supervising the other prisoners.

In summary, aside from the fact that there are a number of differences in details in the Potiphar incident, Malbim differs greatly from Abravanel in his interpretation of the chapter. The latter's purpose was to portray the superior quality and character of Joseph, while the former's aim was to show how God's providence was continually manifested in Joseph.



CHAPTER XIII

ABRAVANEL: DREAMS

In his commentary on Genesis 40-42 Abravanel asks the following questions: Is there any merit to dreams? Can dreams really prognosticate the future or are they simply meaningless and unreal?

Supposing that perhaps he had not served them properly, Joseph asks the butler and baker why they are dejected. They tell him that they have had dreams which no one can interpret. He is not the cause of their despondency.

According to Abravanel, Joseph tells them that they should not rely upon human beings, even upon the magicians of Egypt for the explanation of dreams. In order to interpret dreams correctly one must possess, besides talent, the *ruach ha-kodesh* "the spirit of God." Joseph then says that perhaps God's spirit will be with him and, if so, he might be able to explain the dreams. Abravanel cites Ibn Ezra who asks: Who told Joseph that the three branches in the butler's dream meant three days and not three months? Abravanel answers that the ruach hakodesh, the holy spirit, told him this and not his intuitive faculty.<sup>2</sup> The holy spirit which guides the mouth and the tongue enables one to read the future in all its details.<sup>3</sup>

Abravanel distinguishes among three types of dreams. The first type arises entirely out of the imagination without outside influence. Such dreams are stimulated by excessive eating and drinking. These dreams are called false dreams for they have no foundation in reality.<sup>4</sup>

The second type of dream is produced by external,

supernatural causes when the soul, freed from the constraints imposed by the mind and the senses is at rest and is therefore receptive to impressions from above. These are impressions of future events (not of accidents) which are destined for the individual by reason of the disposition of the heavenly bodies at the time of his birth. These dreams have validity and consequently they are mentioned in Torah and prophets; an example is the dream of Gideon. Of these the sages said that a dream is one-sixtieth of prophecy.

The third category of dreams comes to man through hashgahah ha'elohit, divine providence, by way of the active intellect. Through such dreams specific details in the future life of the individual are disclosed.

Abravanel says that true dreams emanate from God's providence. Both Joseph's and Pharaoh's dreams are true dreams. One who dreams true dreams will feel a sensation of emotion or rapture, which is unknown to the dreamers of false dreams.

Let us now consider Pharaoh's dreams. Pharaoh first dreamt about cows. He slept, awoke, and then dreamt about the sheaves of wheat. Pharaoh was so deeply moved and affected by his dream of the cows that this divine emanation caused him to sleep and then wake up and continue dreaming. Thus, Abravanel resolves the problem of the three separate verses in chapter 41.

Abravanel now tells us that two factors are necessary for dream interpretation. The first one is interpretive

acumen and the second is intuitive ability. A dream does not always contain pure elements. Many times it is mixed, and only the astute know how to eliminate the unnecessary and the superfluous. Joseph could not interpret the dreams on the strength of his intuitive faculty alone. It was the spirit of God which opened the eyes of his intellect and enabled him to perceive the truth. When this holy spirit is present, it guides the interpreter to understand all the elements in the dream and in turn to discern what needs to be interpreted and what is the imaginative element which has no significance. The holy spirit helps the interpreter to delineate between the allegorical elements and the substantive elements, and allows him not only to understand the message itself, but also to understand how the individual, his relatives, his land, his people, will be affected. Then the interpreter will know whether the dream governs a short or long period of time, and whether or not it will affect other nations and other kingdoms. In this way the interpretation will always be free from error.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore in Genesis 40:9 when Joseph said: "Do not interpretations come from God?", and in Genesis 41:16 when he said to Pharaoh, "Not I! God will see to Pharaoh's welfare," Joseph showed his awareness that the dreams and their solutions both derived from a divine emanation, and likewise Pharaoh recognized this truth. Thus he said in Genesis 41:38: "Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?" So, according to Abravanel,

Pharaoh understood the importance of the divine emanation and the holy spirit in interpreting dreams.<sup>8</sup>

Abravanel tells us that the two greatest interpreters of dreams in all of the Bible are Joseph and Daniel. They operated through the holy spirit and not with their intuitive and natural faculties alone. Therefore, one must have a combination of the two, the intuitive faculty and the holy spirit, to be an ideal interpreter of dreams. If one possesses only the intuitive faculty, he is prone to make errors in his analysis of the dream. But when one has the holy spirit, he will see the truth in the words without effort and without error.

Abravanel says that three things testify to the veracity of Pharaoh's dream. They are as follows:

1. The beautiful order of the dream.
2. The fact that he related it the morning after it occurred, that it was fresh in his mind.
3. The effect of the dream upon him: his spirit was agitated as if he felt the strength of this emanation which came from the dream. As a result he sent for his magicians and scholars in the field of natural philosophy to explain his dream.

Is Pharaoh's dream a simple dream or two dreams? Pharaoh perceives it as only one. The interpreters of

Egypt understand it as two separate dreams. Abravanel says that Pharaoh knew all the time that it was only one dream. In explaining the interpretation of dreams, Joseph tells Pharaoh that God alone is responsible for all interpretations. Joseph is only God's mouthpiece, as it were.



CHAPTER XIV

MALBIM: DREAMS

Unlike Abravanel, Malbim does not deal with the efficacy of dreams, nor does he try to explicate the various forms of dreams. He devotes more attention to the actual narrative of the butler and the baker than does Abravanel in his commentary on Chapters 40-42.

Malbim cites a rabbinical interpretation<sup>1</sup> of the offenses committed by the butler and the baker: The butler's offense was that Pharaoh found a bug in his cup, and the baker's, that Pharaoh found a pebble or stone in his bread. To Malbim the baker's offense is the greater; even a unimportant prince would resent the presence of foreign objects in his victuals. The butler's transgression was less heinous. For a bug to fall into a cup was common; none other than the Egyptian monarch would have taken notice.<sup>2</sup>

Like Abravanel, Malbim differentiates between the terms "cupbearer" and "chief cupbearer," "baker" and "chief baker." The chief cupbearer and chief baker were those who served Pharaoh personally. Each had a staff under his supervision; each was responsible for his subordinates. Consequently the king would punish not only the direct offender, but his superior as well. Therefore, when the text says in Genesis 40:1, that the cupbearer and the baker gave offense to their lord, the King of Egypt, Malbim explains that these were the workers appointed by the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. The workers gave offense to their superiors and thus, in turn, to Pharaoh. Again in Genesis 40:2, the text says that Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the

chief baker. According to Malbim, two staff members as well as the chief cupbearer and chief baker.

Malbim emphasizes that the purpose of this entire incident is to set the scene for Joseph's rise to prominence. It was all part of God's divine plan that the servants and officials offend the king, and then be placed in the same prison cell with Joseph.<sup>3</sup> Here Malbim agrees with Abravanel. During his long incarceration Joseph established a rapport with the other men. One does not inquire into other people's personal business without first getting to know them. Only after he felt at ease with his cellmates did he ask why they were so sad.

Unlike Abravanel, Malbim considers the outcome of the two dreams. According to the letter of the law, the chief cupbearer should have been punished and the chief baker set free. In Malbim's mind, the person who is directly responsible for the offense deserves the punishment. Therefore, in keeping with strict justice, the chief cupbearer should have been hanged, not the chief baker, because the chief butler had offered the glass to the king. It was his responsibility to see that the glass was clean. On the other hand, the chief baker himself did not bake the bread; he merely supervised its preparation. Therefore, the baker and not the chief baker should have received severe punishment. However, the verdict allowed the chief butler to go free, but the chief baker was to be hanged.

Malbim comments that each of the two dreamt about his

particular occupation. The chief cupbearer dreamt about grapes and wine. The chief baker dreamt about food that a baker prepares.

Malbim explains that Pharaoh judged the chiefs according to the law which should have been applied to the servants, not according to the law governing the actual chiefs themselves. In other words, according to strict justice, the butler's servant should have gone free.<sup>4</sup> However, Pharaoh allowed the chief butler to go free. On the other hand, the baker's servant should have been executed. Instead, Pharaoh sentenced his chief baker to death.

In discussing the differences between the two levels of servants, Malbim explains their punishment before he comments upon the dreams. Thus he explicates the larger narrative first, and then analyzes a particular section.

If, says Malbim, we examine the dreams very carefully, we find each has two parts. First, the chiefs were going to be judged according to strict justice, i.e., the chief cupbearer would hang, and the chief baker would be set free; but in the second part of their dreams, the decision is reversed. First, let us consider the chief cupbearer's dream. The text tells us (Genesis 40:9) that the chief cupbearer dreamt about a vine which had three branches and had barely budded. Then suddenly the vine began to blossom and a cluster of grapes ripened. Malbim explains that the first part of the dream meant that the chief cupbearer's sentence would be unfavorable for him. This is symbolized by the barrenness

of the three branches. In three days however, his verdict would change even as the vine begins to blossom. In other words, at first he is to hang; but Pharaoh will finally commute his sentence.<sup>5</sup> His property and wealth will be restored and he will be reinstated in his office. Malbim points out that all assassins had their property confiscated. The chief cupbearer was considered as such.

In the chief baker's dream he saw three baskets and in the top basket were the choicest of baked foods for Pharaoh. However, after three days, (which the three baskets represent), the chief baker will die. In the chief butler's dream, we started with three full baskets which the birds were devouring. Malbim interprets the dreams accordingly. At first the chief cupbearer is going to hang. However, after three days, his fate changes for the better and he lives. At first the chief baker is to live, his destiny changes for the worse and he dies.

Although Malbim does not discuss the meaning of dreams as fully as does Abravanel, Malbim recognizes a single type of dream rather than the three types which Abravanel identifies. When the chief servants tell Joseph that they had dreamt, and could find no interpreter of their dreams, Joseph asks: "Do not interpretations come from God? Tell me about the dreams." Malbim explains that verse to mean that dreams do not emanate from the imaginative faculty, but rather from the influence of God.<sup>6</sup>

After Joseph interprets the dreams of the chief cupbearer

and chief baker, he admonishes the former to remember him when he is freed. Malbim makes Joseph say to the chief cupbearer that he is obligated to bring about Joseph's release for these reasons;

1. He will be freed and he will rise again to his previous status because of Joseph's interpretation. Therefore he is obligated to repay Joseph with goodness.
2. Even if he did not owe Joseph anything, it is fitting that he help Joseph out of compassion.
3. If it would be difficult for him to accede to Joseph's request, he could excuse himself on the pretext that too much is asked of him. However, Joseph's is an easy request for him to fulfill.<sup>7</sup>

Malbim points out that the reason for the reversal in justice administered to the chief cupbearer and chief baker was due to divine intervention. It was God's plan that Joseph interpret the dreams directly opposite to the apparent dictates of justice. By this reversal of justice, Joseph is able to rise to greatness. Now the butler would have direct contact with Pharaoh and soon mention Joseph's name.

Genesis 40:27 records that the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph. Malbim tells us that the chief cupbearer's memory failed, being God's scheme in order to involve Pharaoh. Through Pharaoh Joseph would rise to greatness. God made the



chief cupbearer forget in order to show Joseph that all men are fallible, while God is infallible.<sup>8</sup>

Next Malbim examines Pharaoh's dreams. Malbim holds that generally the Hebrew would prefer מלך פלן rather than פלן מלך as in Genesis 41:1. However, in the case of an important personage the order is reversed. His interpretation is based on a Midrash:<sup>9</sup> Only the dream of a king is really a dream. Malbim explains that the magicians of Egypt could not solve Pharaoh's dreams because they could interpret only those dealing with Pharaoh as an individual, and not with dreams of a more general nature. In other words, the dreams were not specifically about Pharaoh, but rather about the country which he rules. Therefore, when Pharaoh called for his interpreters, who knew magic and genealogies, they understood the dreams as referring to two distinct incidents rather than the one which Joseph knew the dreams to be.<sup>10</sup>

According to Malbim, the Egyptians believed the Nile River to possess divine power, and consequently they attributed the years of plenty to the power of the river. Therefore, Pharaoh's dream begins with seven cows which come up from the Nile. After these seven sturdy cows come seven ugly and gaunt cows. There would be no interval between the years of plenty and the years of famine through the river's drying up. This is the first part of the dream, according to Malbim. The second part of the dream gives the solution for the first part. The cows sig-

nify the end of the reaping.

Malbim, like Abravanel, gives arguments to prove that the dream is a true dream. Malbim says that because the dream contains its own solution, this signifies that it is truly prophetic. This he borrows from Rabbi Johanan.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, Pharaoh was not aware that he was dreaming until he awakened. This is a sign of a true dream. Third, the dream came in the morning and Rabbi Johanan says that a dream experienced in the morning is realized.<sup>12</sup> Finally, Pharaoh was very much affected by the dream and this demonstrates that it was a true dream.<sup>13</sup>

After Pharaoh cannot find anyone able to interpret it, the chief cupbearer suddenly remembers how he was returned to the king's palace. Malbim says that the chief cupbearer wants to inform Pharaoh that Joseph solves dreams with "the spirit of God," i.e., by divine inspiration and not by the use of logic or the intuitive faculty. If Joseph had solved the chief butler's and the chief baker's dreams by the application of logic, the chief butler would have been punished and the chief baker set free. This is definite proof that Joseph did not interpret the dreams by means of reason and intuition but rather with a special faculty which the others did not possess. When the chief butler says to Pharaoh (Genesis 41:9) that he must make mention of his offenses, he is referring to the fact that he was guilty, rather than the chief butler. To Malbim, a dream is a divine proclamation. Dreams are interpreted not by astrology, but only with the help of

providence.<sup>14</sup> In this regard Malbim differs from Abravanel who holds that one must have both the intuitive faculty and the holy spirit in order to be the ideal interpreter of dreams.

Malbim tells us that Joseph made three assumptions opposite to those of the magicians. The magicians held that Pharaoh's dreams were two dreams, while Joseph said they were one dream. The magicians held that the dreams related only to Pharaoh's future, while Joseph interpreted them as a single dream affecting more than one person. The magicians did not interpret the dreams according to their simple meanings, but rather in the light of allegory and riddle. Joseph, on the other hand, did interpret the dream according to its simple meaning.<sup>15</sup>

Pharaoh's dream is repeated, says Malbim, for three reasons. First, divine decree is unconditional; it must come to pass. Secondly, while occasionally a decree is issued for a remote time, this decree will soon be implemented. Thirdly, the repetition of the dream is to arouse Pharaoh to appoint a wise officer to prepare for the years of famine.

Malbim explains that Pharaoh's advisors suggested that the responsibility be divided among several officials, since one man alone could not find a solution for all of the problems.<sup>16</sup> They advised that one take charge of the taxes, another of the treasury, and still another control commerce and customs. Joseph felt that one man should be appointed to manage all the affairs of state. He would then appoint department heads to share the work. The chief manager would have

responsibility for ensuring that an adequate measure of each crop would be stored in the king's granaries. Such a man must command the respect and attention of the people. He must be a powerful orator and a shrewd diplomat. He will appoint leaders to collect food to store it in the main cities, and to safeguard it against theft. It is easy to guard the granaries in central locations. Grain, on the one hand, would be set aside for the people who would exhaust their supply of food during the famine years. On the other hand, grain would be stored for the king so that he might carry on commerce and industry. This food could be sold to other nations, with all of the profits going to the royal treasury.<sup>17</sup> Malbim understands Pharaoh to say: We have someone with the spirit of God in him, which is a higher level than mere natural wisdom. Why should we search for someone else when we have here a man who is eminently qualified?<sup>18</sup> Abravanel explains this passage differently. He perceives Pharaoh to be very shrewd and clever. Instead of interpreting the text as Malbim does, Abravanel says that Pharaoh wanted the chief servants to see for themselves that there was no other like Joseph, possessed with the spirit of God.

Unlike Abravanel, Malbim understands that there is a specific reason for the three vayomer statements (vv 39,41,44). Abravanel asks: Why does the text repeat itself? Why could not the text have stated it once? Malbim explains the three vayomer statements in the following manner. Pharaoh first

spoke to Joseph and put him in charge of his house. The second vayomer statement raises Joseph to a higher level where he will now rule over all of the kingdom. The third time Pharaoh makes Joseph second-in-command in the land of Egypt. Malbim says that a king does not raise someone to the highest level unless the individual is initially on some lower level.

Malbim also portrays Pharaoh as a wise man. He suggests that Pharaoh changed Joseph's name in order that the people would not complain that a former slave was now ruling them. Pharaoh also gave Joseph the daughter of a priest in marriage so that the people would believe that Joseph was truly a man of God.

## CHAPTER XV

ABRAVANEL: JOSEPH THE PRIME MINISTER



The next topic to be discussed is Abravanel's treatment of Joseph as Prime Minister of Egypt. Abravanel asks: "Why do the people of Egypt cry out for food in the first year of the famine since they had had the opportunity to store enough food during the years of plenty?" Abravanel tells us that they voiced their apprehension when they saw their stocks diminishing. Therefore, it really was not in the first or second years of the famine that the people cried out to Pharaoh for sustenance.

Joseph sold the people food only when they had exhausted their supply, because they were selling wheat at high prices to the nations surrounding them.<sup>1</sup> Once again we see Joseph's wisdom. He acts in a manner befitting a responsible, rational leader.

These years of famine have a direct effect upon Jacob and his sons. They, too, are in need of food. Genesis 42:1 tells us that Jacob saw that there was food in Egypt. Abravanel resolves this apparent misconception thus: there really was new crop in Egypt, but that there were sellers of the Pharaoh's grain. Jacob saw merchants coming from Egypt. They bought food in order to sell it at a higher price. When Jacob says to his sons (Genesis 42:1): "Why do you keep looking at one another?" as if to say, go down and get us food, he really means, according to Abravanel: "Why are you staring at one another? Go down and buy food from Egypt and then sell it like the others are doing. In this way you will be rich!"<sup>2</sup>

Why was it necessary for all ten brothers to go to Egypt? Abravanel answers: The brothers' journey is part of a divine plan, and they are just one element in its fulfillment. Joseph had dreamt that they were binding sheaves in the field when suddenly his sheaf stood erect, and all the other sheaves gathered around and bowed low to his sheaf. By their journey and their obeisance to Joseph, they are in fact fulfilling Joseph's dream.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Benjamin also had to go to Egypt in order to fulfill that part of the dream in which eleven stars were bowing down to Joseph. Abravanel offers another explanation for all ten brothers' going to Egypt when one or two would have sufficed. He says that each had a household of his own and had to supply it. Although each went down to Egypt for his individual needs, they decided to go as a group.<sup>4</sup>

Abravanel tells us that Joseph alone was responsible for distributing and selling rations. There were no other officers in Pharaoh's government who were appointed for this purpose. This again is all part of the divine scheme. Joseph had to sell the food himself in order to see his brothers. Only he would recognize them. Additionally the dream refers to sheaves. The allusion to harvesting crops is central to the fulfillment of the dream.

Abravanel asks: "If Joseph is such a wise and perfect man, why then does he transgress the Torah by taking revenge?"<sup>5</sup> Abravanel answers: Joseph recognized his brothers after twenty-two years. He remembered their faces from pictures which he

which he must have had. He therefore feared that the brothers might recognize him. Therefore he behaved like a stranger; perhaps, as Nachmanides thinks, he lowered his face with his turban. Abravanel suggests that he disguised his voice by shouting at them harshly and abruptly. All this he did to hide his identity. Joseph knew that if he not agitate them, they might recognize him. He therefore had to frighten and effront them so that they would not have opportunity to take careful notice.

Abravanel asks: "Why, if Joseph is the perfect man, does he do harm to his brothers as well as to his father by making it difficult for them to obtain food, by incarcerating Simeon, and by asking Benjamin to leave Jacob?" Abravanel replies that Joseph's intent was only to cause them pain and sorrow, not to do them evil. The reason for his returning their money was in order that they would not be able to use the lack of funds as an excuse for their not returning to Egypt quickly. Again, he does not tell them this because he wishes them to suffer anguish and fear. Their mental and emotional turmoil would be their punishment for their misdeeds. Here Abravanel employs the rabbinic axiom: Measure for measure.<sup>6</sup> Joseph, as we know from Abravanel's commentary, was wise. He understood that in order to save his father and brothers he had to be sold by his brothers and therefore his brothers did not deserve punishment. This, as was stated, was all part of the Divine scheme. However, because of their evil in-

tentions, Joseph treated them measure for measure.<sup>7</sup> Joseph did not intend evil to befall them because of his actions, not only to make them uncomfortable. Although they had intended evil toward Joseph, and had caused him pain and suffering, God had made their criminal conduct into a source of great good.

The story of Joseph thus becomes a marvelous illustration of the wisdom, mercy, and justice of God.

1. Joseph was hated by his brothers.

In Egypt he was loved by Pharaoh and by all of Egypt.

2. The brothers hated Joseph because of his dreams.

The Egyptians loved him because of dreams.

3. The brothers stripped Joseph of his multi-colored coat.

Pharaoh dressed him with coats of silk and put jewels around his neck.

4. The brothers threw him into a pit, naked.

Pharaoh brought him hastily from the pit, shaved him, and changed his clothes.

5. Joseph was sold as a slave.

Joseph sold to all who came.

6. Before Joseph approached his brothers they conspired to kill him.

When they approached him, Joseph manipulated circumstances to their benefit.

7. Joseph was separated from his brothers.  
His brothers were joined together with  
him in Egypt.
8. Joseph went down to Egypt in degradation.  
Joseph was given all of the land of Egypt  
to provide for.
9. Potiphar's wife asked him to sleep with her  
and he refused.  
He married Ashat daughter of Potiphara.
10. The butler did not remember Joseph.  
Joseph remembered and praised Pharaoh.

This demonstrates a divine plan. God, through Joseph took what was evil and turned it into great good.<sup>8</sup>

Now we can understand how God's plan played one measure against the other. First, the brothers suspected Joseph to be a talebearer, and because of this they hated him. We are told that they would not speak with him in a friendly manner. They thought that his friendly overtures masked his true desire to spy on them. God punished the brothers, ironically, by allowing Joseph to accuse them of espionage and refuse their request for grain. Second, Joseph, who had been cast into a pit, and then sold into slavery by his siblings, cast his brother, Simeon into jail in Egypt. In effect, he held Simeon as hostage to insure Benjamin's coming to Egypt.<sup>9</sup>

Abravanel tells us that Joseph was confronted with three possibilities. First, he thought that he ought not



reveal himself to the brothers, and thus behave toward them just as they have behaved toward him: i.e., cruelly and vengefully. But this he could not do. Second, he considered the repercussions if his brothers recognized him. Would it not be embarrassing to him socially and politically if the circumstances surrounding his coming to Egypt became public knowledge? Third, what consequences would ensue if, having been recognized by his brothers, he decided to return to Canaan? He was in control of Pharaoh's treasury and such actions on his part would certainly be suspect. He might be accused of treason. He considered bringing his entire family to Egypt. He would then be in a position to maintain and care for them. However, he feared they might once again become envious of him and attempt to harm him. He wished to determine whether, after twenty-two years, their characters had changed, and whether they had repented of their evil behavior. Joseph says to the brothers: "You are spies." <sup>10</sup> He then sees for himself that they had indeed repented when they say: "We are being punished on account of our brother." <sup>11</sup>

After seeing the first dream come true, Joseph then proceeds to carry out phase two of this divine plan. He now wanted to know whether their father and younger brother Benjamin were still alive, in order that the second dream might come to fruition. The text reads: "And Joseph recalled the dreams that he had dreamed about them." <sup>12</sup> Why "the dreams which he dreamt about them" when they were



about himself? Abravanel answers that the purpose of these dreams was not to inform Joseph about what was to happen, but rather to announce to his brothers that they should not hate Joseph. This was all in the divine scheme which was foretelling the future: Joseph was to rule over them and they would bow down to him. Joseph told them his dreams in order that they might heed them for these were prophetic dreams. Joseph, the perfect man, dreamt about them in order to remove from them any errors and to inform them of the truth.<sup>13</sup> However, the brothers did not understand this, so they continued to hate Joseph, and eventually sold him as a slave.

Once again, Abravanel tells us that Joseph was applying the rabbinic axiom *אין דלן דאין* with them. His purpose in remembering the dreams was to inform them of the truth. They did not accept it. In order to punish them for this, he told them that he knew that their business was related to espionage. Just as they suspected him to be a tale-bearer and a spy for their father, so he now accused them. Why then, asks Abravanel, does the text use repetitive language when it says: "You are spies, you have come to see the land in its nakedness?" Would it not have been sufficient simply to state that they were spies?<sup>14</sup> Abravanel answers that the first statement is of a more general nature, and that the second one is more specific. The former says in essence that their work is spying; they are experts in espionage. The latter tells us specifically the reason for

their espionage. They came to see the land in its nakedness. Abravanel asks: "Why did they only respond to the second part of the charge?" <sup>15</sup> He explains that they answered the second part of the charge because that was the more critical and more essential part. They told Joseph that they came to Egypt for the purpose of buying food. Then they say, in essence: "Why should you say that we are spies, for each one of us could testify for the other. We are honest and honorable men. We are not spies by profession." The reason that the brothers answered that they were all sons of the same man, honest men and not spies, was also to prove to Joseph that one man would not be so foolish as to send all of his spies and thus endanger them all. Abravanel has the brothers saying to Joseph that one finds this professions only in empty secretive people to whom no one pays any attention. Obviously they are not spies, because they are honest and important men, not empty and secretive people. Joseph, replies: "I did previously suspect you but now I believe you to be spies. It is unlikely that a man should have ten male children and this falsehood which you have told shows me that you have come to this land to uncover its nakedness." <sup>16</sup> Joseph pretends that their asking for food conceals their espionage. The brothers, frustrated by their efforts to try to prove their innocence, continue to be assertive in their claims and offer more information. They tell Joseph that they number twelve; one is no longer

with them and one is at home. All of these details help to prove their veracity, and support their denial of espionage.

Abravanel asks: "How would the brothers' bringing Benjamin to Egypt prove their truthfulness?" <sup>17</sup> He replies that the test did not consist of their bringing Benjamin, for if it were the text should have read: "וְיָבִיאוּ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" and not "וְיָבִיאוּ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל." <sup>18</sup> Abravanel understands Joseph to be saying that truly they are spies and they have always engaged in this field because they had not been tested previously. They thought that this mission would be as successful as their previous endeavors. But, this will not happen. "וְעַתָּה" means this time they will be tested. Joseph will search into this matter. Therefore, Joseph first plans to incarcerate all of the brothers except for one who will bring Benjamin back to him. Joseph fears that if he sends all of them, they might tell the younger brother to speak falsehood and deceit. In essence, Joseph is saying: Put yourselves in custody. I shall then have the time to investigate who you are and what you do. Joseph did not swear falsely. He said to the brothers that if they were not telling the truth about their relationship, they would be considered to be spies. Abravanel thinks that it must have been the custom to incarcerate suspects for three days until they could be investigated. Such was the practice in his day. However, before this three-day period has expired, Joseph tells his brothers that he is a God-fearing

man, and he does not want them to die. He asks them to select one of their brothers to remain behind as a guarantee. He will not investigate further, but will accept their words. If he were to search carefully, they might prove deserving of death.

Abravanel tells us that Joseph made every effort to get the brothers to bring Benjamin to him. He offers some reasons for Joseph's doing so. They are as following:

1. Joseph wanted to see his brother, the son of his mother Rachel. Joseph suspected that the brothers might have killed Benjamin or sold him as they had done to him.
2. Joseph's purpose for wanting Benjamin to come was to create an aura of tension to set the stage for the goblet incident. Joseph wanted to see if the brothers would try to save Benjamin as would brothers who care for one another. Joseph wanted to know whether the brothers would abandon Benjamin because of their hatred for him, since he was the son of Rachel and not the son of Leah.
3. Joseph held Simeon in bondage just as he himself had been. Simeon served a twofold purpose: to insure Benjamin's return to Egypt and to demonstrate the anguish of involuntary servitude.

All of Joseph's action were done in order to punish

the brothers for their sins. Thus, he is using middah keneged middah. Abravanel tells us that Joseph's intention was not to take revenge, as is demonstrated by his remorse later. Instead, Joseph was motivated by the desire to improve his brothers' characters and to help them attain self-perfection.

When the brothers heard Joseph say: "Go and buy food for your households," they believed that he was God-fearing. They saw that this man had mercy on their wives and children although he was harsh with them. But, in reality, he also had pity on them: for who else would have showed compassion to strangers, people one had never seen before. When the brothers realized this, they admitted how guilty they had been. They had not shown mercy toward their brother as the Lord had shown toward them. Therefore, the purpose of these tests, according to Abravanel, was to elicit an admission of guilt from them. We see that they are bitter with themselves for their misconduct. They became aware that their suffering was caused by their treatment of Joseph. They had not behaved as wise, learned, nor compassionate men, but as drunkards and felons. They were beginning to see that God was not repaying their cruelty in like measure.

Now the brothers considered themselves to be perpetrators of a grievous error. But, Reuben asks them how they could possibly claim this when they had conspired to kill Joseph. Joseph, touched, concludes that the brothers feel true remorse. He then selects the people he wishes



to stay with him, for he does not want to cause the brothers additional pain. He chooses Simeon, knowing full well that he is the greatest of all the sinners. Aware that Reuben had no part in the conspiracy, Joseph therefore does not punish him. The principle of Middah Kermood middah is once again operable when Joseph incarcerates Simeon, the one who was responsible for plotting against Joseph.<sup>20</sup>

Even though Joseph had tested them once, twice, and again, he still was not certain that the brothers really loved Benjamin. For that reason, he had to involve Benjamin, specifically in the test of the goblet, in order to determine if the brothers would save him. According to Abravanel, Joseph had his servants put money into each of the brothers' bags so that they would recognize that it was not Benjamin's fault, but rather the deed of the master. Knowing this, they then would be put to the final test, and Joseph would be able to ascertain the sincerity of their repentance.<sup>21</sup> Only then would Joseph identify himself and treat them well. If they did not act properly, he would know that they had not changed for the better. Abravanel takes issue with Nahmanides who says that the silver cup was placed in the sack as a gift from Joseph in exchange for the gift which the brothers had brought Joseph. The brothers knew all the time that this cup was there.

Abravanel asks: "What does the text mean by שמעו?"<sup>22</sup> The regular custom in Egypt was to cry out: "Did anyone see the thief who stole from such and such? Pursue him and catch



him!" In this case Joseph did not want others to apprehend them. Instead, he directed his steward to pursue them, to speak to them quietly, and not to publicize the incident.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps Abravanel means that had the people pursued them, they might have harmed the brothers, and this is not what Joseph wanted.

The brothers do not want to be judged in accordance with strict justice.<sup>24</sup> They had the opportunity of handing over Benjamin to Joseph and setting themselves free. But we see a definite change in the brothers' characters. Abravanel says that this test of taking the cup from the king is another example of middah keneged middah. For taking the cup from the king is equivalent to taking his power, rule, and greatness from him. Just as they wanted to be a lord, they will now be a slave to Joseph, Lord of the land.

In Genesis 44:18, Judah draws near to Joseph and speaks. Abravanel asks: "What does it mean that he approached Joseph, since he was already speaking with him?" Abravanel explains that Judah wanted to speak to Joseph in private concerning his becoming a guarantee in place of Benjamin. Judah approached Joseph in order that no one else might hear him since there were others in the room at the time, since he felt personally responsible and therefore had to plead. Judah tells Joseph not to be impatient or angry with him, since it was a breach of protocol to approach him. Therefore Judah says:

"Please do not think that by approaching you I mean to shame you. I realize you speak for Pharaoh, and I respect you."

In Judah's relating the Benjamin episode to Joseph, he says that Joseph asked the brothers about themselves, about their father, and their brother. Abravanel asks: "How can Judah say that Joseph had asked about Jacob and Benjamin when the brothers themselves had volunteered the information?"<sup>25</sup> Abravanel has Judah say to Joseph: "You really did not ask, but we ourselves volunteered the information about Benjamin and Jacob, for we wanted to show how beloved Benjamin is to our father." According to Abravanel, all of this was simply to arouse Joseph's pity for their father. Benjamin realized that if he were to leave his father, Jacob would die. In other words, Judah was revealing to Joseph the spiritual and physical link between the old man and the boy.<sup>26</sup>

Abravanel says that the reason Jacob did not want to send Benjamin with the brothers was because he feared that they might attempt to kill Benjamin and claim that a disaster had occurred as had happened with Joseph.<sup>27</sup> Judah continues to plead with Joseph to take him as servant instead of Benjamin. Judah does not want to be considered a murderer through having caused Jacob's death. He realizes that he could not possibly return to his father without Benjamin. Thus the story is complete. God paid back the debt to Joseph's brothers with midah k'neged midah.

First we have the tale of the slaves, then Simeon's imprisonment, then Benjamin's slavery. Only Judah remains to be dealt with, for he was the one who had advised selling Joseph into slavery. For that reason Judah must make himself a slave for Benjamin, the son of Joseph's mother. In this final episode the entire debt is repaid.<sup>28</sup>

## CHAPTER XVI

MALBIM: JOSEPH THE PRIME MINISTER

In Genesis 41:53 we learn that the seven years of abundance that the land of Egypt had enjoyed came to an end. Malbim explains that these seven years of plenty were experienced only in Egypt and then the famine began immediately.<sup>1</sup> Both Malbim<sup>2</sup> and Abravanel<sup>3</sup> tell us that the people of Egypt had food at the inception of the famine but they were selling it to other nations. Therefore their supply was quickly exhausted. They cried to Pharaoh who, in turn, sent them to the Prime Minister, Joseph. Malbim tells us that the famine became so intense that no food was to be found. Therefore Joseph put his plan into operation. He was ready to meet this challenge since he had taken the necessary precautions (at the time of the famine). Malbim tells us that Joseph opened the storehouses in every main city where he had ordered food to be stored. His second order limited food distribution to Egyptians.<sup>4</sup> However, the crisis worsened. With the food stockpiles in the main cities exhausted, the Egyptians now had to purchase food from the royal storehouse. According to Malbim, Joseph had taken personal charge of the royal storehouse and had insured a sufficient reserve supply for the famine years.<sup>5</sup> Malbim tells us that the food kept in the royal storehouse was generally used for export.<sup>6</sup>

The famine had also affected the surrounding nations. Jacob and his family were suffering from a lack of food. According to Malbim, when Jacob saw that merchants were bringing back food from Egypt, he asked his sons: "Are you not concerned about the high food prices brought about by the famine?"

Ask these merchants where they are buying their food!" <sup>7</sup>  
 Abravanel offers a somewhat similar explanation. Instead of Jacob's simply asking: "Why don't you go down to Egypt and save us money by eliminating the middleman? Abravanel suggests that Jacob tells his sons to go down to Egypt, buy food and retail it as these merchants are doing. "By so doing will you become rich!" <sup>8</sup>

Malbim comments that as soon as Jacob had ascertained that the Prime Minister was selling food, he told his sons to buy from him rather than from the merchants whose prices were exorbitant. <sup>9</sup> Malbim tells us that all of the brothers except Benjamin went to Egypt. There were two reasons for this: One, to ask about their brother Joseph. Two, to fulfill God's divine plan, which meant paying obeisance to Joseph and thereby fulfilling that which was foretold in the dream (Genesis 37:6). <sup>10</sup> The second reason is also given by Abravanel, who likewise records the entire Joseph story as fulfilling a divine plan. However, Abravanel does not mention that the brothers went to Egypt to inquire about Joseph. <sup>11</sup>

When the brothers had arrived in Egypt, they went to see the Prime Minister. At this point, the brothers fulfill the first part of Joseph's dream. Malbim tells us that when Joseph saw them for the first time, he thought that he recognized them. <sup>12</sup> Not until he had heard their voices was he certain that these were his brothers. <sup>13</sup> Both Abravanel <sup>14</sup> and Malbim <sup>15</sup> say that Joseph behaved as a stranger to them and



spoke harshly to them in order to avoid their recognizing him. When he asked from where they had come, Malbim tells us that all they needed to answer was that they were from the land of Canaan. They offered too much information by saying that they were from the land of Canaan, and that they had come to purchase food. The latter response enabled Joseph to accuse them of espionage.<sup>16</sup> Malbim says that when an individual answers more than officials ask, this is a definite indication that he considers himself to have done something wrong and wishes to be exonerated.<sup>17</sup>

Joseph then remembered his dreams. According to Malbim, the dreams promised three things: 1. Joseph would be stronger than the brothers (Genesis 37:7). 2. The brothers would bow down to Joseph willingly. (This was not completely fulfilled until Benjamin came to Egypt.) 3. Joseph's father and his wives would bow down to him (Genesis 37:9). (This also did not occur until later.) Therefore, Malbim tells us, Joseph had to devise a plan to bring Benjamin and his father to Egypt.<sup>18</sup> Joseph then accuses the brothers of espionage.

Malbim points out that there are two types of spies: The first comes to evaluate the land as a potential homeland (e.g. Joshua and Caleb). The second comes to evaluate the military strength of the land for future subjugation.<sup>19</sup>

Joseph, Malbim writes, is accusing the brothers of being spies by profession, since it is certain that they have been to Egypt more than once. Since this is not the brothers' initial visit, they have obviously returned in order to

survey the unfortified places and to ascertain the country's weaknesses.<sup>20</sup> According to Malbim, the brothers answered only the first part of the charge.<sup>21</sup> Abravanel says just the opposite: They answered only the second part of the charge because it was the more critical.<sup>22</sup>

Malbim understands the brothers to cite four reasons to explain their denial of espionage. First, they say: "If we came for no reason, with no business in mind, you could say that we were spies. But we came to buy food and this is known." Second, "If we were spies, only one or two of us would have come to Egypt, not ten of us. If we came from ten different nations for different reasons, or if we were from ten different families, then you could rightfully accuse us of being spies. But we are all of the same family." Third, "If you would find all ten of us in different parts of the land searching and then running home to give a report to our chief, you could certainly suspect us of spying. If you were to apprehend ten people in ten different places and they were all of one family, you would then have the right to suspect us as spies. And if you think that we were dispersed throughout the land and now came together, this is not so for we are all honest men. Just as we are here together, so we entered the land. Therefore, we are not spies." Fourth, "You could call us spies, if we had been found spying at some prior time. This is not the case."<sup>23</sup>

According to Malbim, Joseph answered: "Surely, your explanation is satisfactory concerning your intent in coming

here now, since you could have scouted the land on your first trip.<sup>24</sup> Joseph repeats the accusation that they have come to determine the weaknesses of Egypt with an eye to military conquest. Ten men had come to check the fortifications. Ten men were necessary in the event that one or two were captured. The remainder could resist and escape. Spies live dangerously. It is to be expected.<sup>25</sup> The brothers reply that a father would not risk ten sons. It is not as if he has sixty more at home.<sup>26</sup> The brothers then recount their family history: One brother is at home, and one is no longer with them. They ask: "How could a father be so foolish as to send his sons to certain death unless he had a very good reason?"<sup>27</sup> The brothers add that their father is not an official but only a resident of Canaan. By saying this, they hope to refute Joseph's previous charge.<sup>28</sup> Joseph retorts that it does not make sense that ten men would come to Egypt to purchase food. Therefore he must conclude that they are definitely spies from ten different tribes.<sup>29</sup> Yet there is a way to prove their veracity: to bring their youngest brother from Canaan. He will then be able to determine whether or not they are telling the truth.<sup>30</sup> Abravanel counters: How would this prove their veracity?<sup>31</sup> Malbim does not even raise the question. His interpretation differs from the text and from Abravanel. Malbim says that to send one of the brothers to fetch Benjamin would not be a test. However, to detain all of the brothers in Egypt and send a message with credentials for Benjamin would be more satisfactory. Meanwhile, the officials would be able to verify the

brothers' story.<sup>32</sup> That this was the custom during the time of the Judges, but the brothers objected because they knew that Jacob would refuse to send Benjamin in the custody of an Egyptian.<sup>33</sup>

Abravanel understands this incident differently. He says that all of the brothers would be incarcerated except for one. This brother would return to Canaan and bring Benjamin. During this time, an investigation would take place to verify the brothers' story.<sup>34</sup>

Malbim then understands Joseph to say the following: "If this were my primary choice for the test, it would prove the truth conclusively. However, since you are not satisfied with this and since I, as a God-fearing man, can jail you on suspicion alone, I will devise a second test:<sup>35</sup> Although this second test is not foolproof (since you could still bring the wrong individual back), it will suffice.<sup>36</sup> It is at this point that Joseph tells the brothers that only one of their number will remain as a hostage. If they are telling the truth, they will return to liberate their brother. Malbim tells us that the brothers agreed to this. This is what is meant by vayasu chen, in Genesis 42:20.<sup>37</sup> The brothers consulted each other and, as Malbim explains, they decided that there were three reasons for this turn of events.<sup>38</sup> They have sinned. The Prime Minister is not wrong to test the veracity of their story because they themselves are at fault. Malbim,<sup>39</sup> like Abravanel,<sup>40</sup> employs the rabbinic axiom middah kenessed middah or measure for measure, to explain the brothers'

words. The brothers realize that they are being punished for what they have done to Joseph. They say:

1. They should have overlooked Joseph's actions out of brotherly love.
2. They should have shown mercy and pity toward him.
3. They should have forgiven him out of compassion.

Because of this, they are suffering middah keneged middah at his entreaties.<sup>41</sup> Just as Joseph was deliberately sold by them, the Prime Minister is taking one of their brothers from them. Reuben, the oldest brother, adds that they should not think that they had been right in punishing Joseph. They had sinned in not showing mercy to their brother. They had not acted justly. Joseph had been only an immature lad.<sup>42</sup> Reuben had warned them, but they had not heeded. According to their system of justice, Joseph might have been deserving of punishment, but not of slavery or death.<sup>43</sup>

The concept of measure for measure is employed when Joseph takes Simeon as a hostage. Malbim, like Abravanel, shows how everything in the narrative demonstrates the principle of "measure for measure."

- 1a. The brothers thought Joseph to be a tattletale and spy.



- 1b. Joseph took them for spies.
- 2a. Simeon threw Joseph into a pit.
- 2b. Joseph threw Simeon into jail. However, first Joseph put all of them into jail for three days, because they had all agreed to Simeon's plan.
- 3a. The brothers sold Joseph for twenty silver pieces.
- 3b. Joseph frightened them by returning their money and placing it in their sacks.
- 4a. The brothers sold Joseph as a slave.
- 4b. Judah later says: "Behold we are servants to our lord," and Judah took it upon himself to be a slave.<sup>44</sup>

Abravanel mentions nine "measure for measure" occurrences; Malbim cites only these four.<sup>45</sup>

Before the brothers leave Egypt, Joseph orders his stewards to place grain in their bags and to return their money as well.<sup>46</sup> Malbim distinguishes between the words amtachnat and sac. He observes that other commentators explain the difference between the two thus: Joseph's servants placed the grain in the large sack, in the front of which he placed the money inside a small pouch.<sup>47</sup> Joseph instructed his staff to provide his brothers with ample provisions for the return journey so that they would not have to open their bags. They departed immediately without staying the night at the inn.<sup>48</sup> When one of them opened the bag to feed his mule, he was startled to see the money which he had thought he had given to Joseph in exchanged for the food.<sup>49</sup> Immediately the broth-



ers attributed this strange phenomenon to an act of God.<sup>50</sup> They reckoned that they had been sufficiently punished for their ill treatment of Joseph by having been incarcerated for three days, but they could not understand what else they could have done to evoke God's anger.<sup>51</sup> When the brothers arrived home, they told Jacob all that had happened to them. Malbim calls attention to the use of korot, rather than motsa'ot which also means happening or occurrence.<sup>52</sup> Malbim comments that the latter explains a thing which is dependent upon a cause. The former refers to something happening coincidentally, without any cause.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, according to Malbim, the brothers told their father about the money, the presence of which they could not explain. The brothers did not tell Jacob that Joseph was sure that they were spies but only that Joseph suspected them to be spies and that even if they brought back Benjamin, it would not really change Joseph's mind.<sup>54</sup> However, it would insure that Simeon and the rest of them would not be killed. Malbim appears to be telling us that the brothers are really changing their ways. They are trying to lighten the pain and anguish which their father must be experiencing at the moment. Therefore they explained to Jacob what had happened in Egypt, and that Benjamin could help save their lives. Reacting bitterly, Jacob told his sons that they already had caused him pain on two occasions. First he had sent Joseph to Shechem and he was killed, and the sin is his, the father's. Now the loss of Simeon and Benjamin will be his responsibility; for sending them to a dangerous place.<sup>55</sup>

Reuben replies that he will accept which Jacob believes to be his. He will bear responsibility for the safety of his two brothers.<sup>56</sup> At first Jacob replied in the negative because of the terrible losses he had sustained with Joseph, Simeon, and now Benjamin, but after he realizes that it is senseless for him to refuse, he bids his sons to return and procure as much food as possible.<sup>57</sup> "If you cannot get a large quantity, get a sufficient amount, enough to sustain us all."<sup>58</sup> Jacob still does not realize that if they do not bring Benjamin, not only will they not receive grain, but also the Prime Minister will punish them. Judah then has to be straightforward with Jacob: "If we do not bring Benjamin, we will all definitely die from starvation."<sup>59</sup> Reluctantly consenting, Jacob instructs them to bring the Prime Minister a gift. He admonishes them not to buy anything too expensive, lest it appear to be a bribe.<sup>60</sup> It was the custom to bring a gift to a foreign dignitary out of respect for his graciousness in granting an audience.<sup>61</sup> This gift, Malbim explains will also show that the brothers are honest and sincere, for a sinner would be embarrassed to bring a gift to someone against whom he has transgressed.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, says the father, they should also restore the money which had been returned to them as a test of their honesty.<sup>63</sup> They were to add that it must have been an oversight on Joseph's part. Jacob wishes them success. He hopes that God will grant the brothers the mercy He withheld when Jacob lost Joseph.<sup>64</sup>

When the brothers approached Joseph's steward, they quickly explained what had transpired. If, they said, they had returned to Egypt when they had become aware of the situation, then their households would have all perished from starvation.<sup>65</sup> The brothers had lodged in Joseph's house and Joseph had sent them away early the next morning.<sup>66</sup> Malbim explains that Joseph had sent the brothers away at dawn because he feared that they might find the food, money, and the goblet which he had his stewards place in their bags.<sup>67</sup> After Joseph had given them sufficient time to be on their journey, he ordered his guards to pursue them so that he could accuse them of stealing his goblet. Malbim explains that Joseph told them that he did not suspect them to be thieves, because the goblet was of little value. He believed the reason they had stolen the goblet was to take revenge, to do evil, and to cause him pain.<sup>68</sup> How could they treat him so basely when he had treated them well?<sup>69</sup> Malbim then offers another reason for the alleged theft of the goblet. He says that sometimes a person will steal something which is valuable or precious. In this instance, the brothers took the goblet because they saw that Joseph used it for divination and therefore they wanted it.<sup>70</sup> The brothers remind Joseph that if they were thieves, they would not have returned the original money which was accidentally placed in their sacks.<sup>71</sup> Joseph tells them that their return of the money does not prove their innocence since they knew that Joseph could foretell the future with the aid of

his goblet. Joseph would know that they stole the money. Therefore, they had to return the money.<sup>72</sup> Now that they had returned the money, they took the goblet to prevent Joseph's performing any divination and thus come to know of the theft of the money.<sup>73</sup> Joseph was making a three part accusation:<sup>74</sup> the theft of the original money, which they had returned, the theft of the money just found in their bags, and the goblet.<sup>75</sup> Malbim explains that Joseph could hold all the brothers responsible, but this would be unfair. Therefore, he decided to punish only the one who had stolen money and the goblet.<sup>76</sup> Abravanel comments that the reason for Joseph's testing the brothers with this third ordeal was to see if they really loved Benjamin.<sup>77</sup> Malbim holds that Joseph's aim was to ascertain whether the brothers were devoted and committed to each other, and to see if they still felt hatred for the sons of Rachel.<sup>78</sup> Abravanel makes it clear that Joseph was not sure after the first and second tests and therefore needed to test them again.<sup>79</sup> Malbim suggests that the two previous tests were simply to make recompense for all that they had done to Joseph.<sup>80</sup> In other words, middah keneged middah, measure for measure. Abravanel specifically tells us that Joseph had his doubts about the brothers' sincerity.<sup>81</sup>

Why did Judah approach Joseph? Malbim says that a person who is brought to trial has an alternative. He can either ask for strict justice by means of a trial, or he can plead for mercy and compassion. A person who wants to pre-



claim his innocence must demonstrate it by proof before a judge. A person who requests compassion does not have to prove his innocence. He need only admit his crime and beg compassion and forgiveness by going before a king who can nullify the crime and its punishment.<sup>82</sup> Judah knew that he could not prevail if he asked for justice. He could only ask for compassion,<sup>83</sup> and he could ask only Joseph, since he alone had power to pardon offenders. Therefore, Judah's first argument was offered before the judges who were with Joseph. The second time, Judah approaches Joseph alone; he tells Joseph that he is asking now for compassion and not strict justice. That is why Joseph should not be angry with him as if he were asking Joseph to pervert the law and prevent justice. Judah had no choice but to ask Joseph alone.<sup>84</sup> Abravanel says that Judah approached Joseph in order that no one else might hear him, since there were others in the room at the time.<sup>85</sup> Unlike Abravanel, Malbim does not question the fact that Judah tells Joseph that he had asked him about his father and Benjamin, when the brothers themselves had volunteered the information. Abravanel sees this to be an apparent discrepancy.<sup>86</sup> Malbim passes over it without comment. Judah then explains to Joseph the difficulty that they had had in bringing Benjamin to Egypt. Malbim has Judah saying: "See how pampered and tender Benjamin is. We have an old father who longs for his son. Because he is the son of his old age, he is more spoiled than we are. In addition, his brother by the same mother died, and there-

fore our father is more careful with him." <sup>87</sup> At the conclusion of the discourse, Judah, begging for mercy, implores Joseph to take him as a surrogate for Benjamin, for surely Judah is stronger and more suited for servitude. <sup>88</sup> The exchange, Judah persists, is definitely to Joseph's advantage; Judah could not return to his father's house without his brother Benjamin. <sup>89</sup> At this point, Joseph can no longer restrain himself and reveals his identity to his brothers. Abravanel stresses that this episode is essential in order to pay back Joseph's brothers with middah keneged middah. <sup>90</sup> Malbim apparently agrees.

The episode of the brothers' asking for food is only one of the incidents with which Joseph has to deal while he is Prime Minister. His own people, citizens of Egypt, have exhausted their supplies; the municipal supply is also depleted, and only the royal storehouse is still filled with food. <sup>91</sup> The people have no more resources to give in exchange for the wheat. <sup>92</sup> Joseph, as a God-fearing man, did not want to put the people into servitude because of their lack of resources. Therefore he took their land so that all of it would belong to Pharaoh. Those who still wanted to work the land would give one-fifth of their produce to Pharaoh, <sup>93</sup> and retain four-fifths. <sup>94</sup> This would not be an undue burden since the people had been obligated to pay one-fifth of their produce during the years of plenty. <sup>95</sup> Thus the people could maintain their dignity. They were not slaves, but rather workers for the King and the Prime Minister. They were truly grate-



ful for Joseph's goodness. All they hoped was that they would be good and able servants to Pharaoh, and by so doing bring honor to themselves.

Malbim portrays Joseph as a considerate, generous, and wise statesman. Abravanel, does not emphasize this aspect of Joseph's character.

## CHAPTER XVII

ABRAVANEL: JOSEPH REVEALS HIS IDENTITY

Joseph has finished testing his brothers and is now ready to disclose himself to them. Genesis 45:1 tells that because Joseph could not control himself in the presence of his attendants, he dismisses them. This, says Abravanel, is the third time that Joseph cries. He wept first after the brothers had realized that they were being punished because of what they had done to Joseph. He wept again when he saw Benjamin in Egypt, and lastly just before he revealed his identity.

Joseph cries both because of his pride in his brothers and because of his love for them. He says that his brothers are respected and superior human beings. Joseph wants the Egyptians to know that these are men of stature, perfect men. He is sad and sorry that he has not seen them in so many years. The reason for the Torah's telling us this is to inform us of the greatness of Joseph and to show us how wise he was in all of his endeavors. Without this claims Abravanel, the entire story lacks meaning.<sup>1</sup>

Abravanel queries: Why does Joseph ask what he already knows; namely, how his father is?<sup>2</sup> Abravanel replies that Joseph asked this question in order to put his brothers at ease; he did not want them to feel ashamed. Nor did he want to remind them that they had sold him into slavery. Therefore, he began by asking: Is my father (not their father) still living? That is to say: Is my father, who loves me, still alive, or has he died from a broken heart upon losing Benjamin? Joseph wants to know the truth. After ascertaining his father's situation, he intends to

ask them about their families. The frightened brothers cannot answer him. Therefore, Joseph says to them: "I am Joseph, your brother whom you sold as a slave."<sup>3</sup> Joseph must convince them that he is really their brother. His mention of this event proves to them that he is the person he claims to be, since the brothers had never disclosed this incident to anyone else. Joseph does not want his brothers to feel that he still hates them. Therefore he says: "I am Joseph, your brother," indicating that he feels like a brother, one who cares and loves his siblings.

Joseph was always sensitive to other peoples' feelings. In order that the Egyptians might not hear his telling his brothers about his having been sold as a slave, he bids the brothers to draw near so that he might speak to them privately, and so that he would not shame his brothers before the Egyptians. Because the Egyptian stewards were outside the door and were able to hear all that took place inside, Joseph brought his brothers near. Worried that they will fear him, he begs them not to grieve that they sold him into servitude. Five more years of famine remain. It is God's providence that sent him before them to insure their survival.<sup>4</sup>

According to Abravanel, Joseph was sold in order to put God's plan into action; namely, that Joseph should attain greatness and then care for his brothers. This being God's will, the brothers were not deserving of punishment. Nevertheless, they had attempted to harm him, and so mer-

ited punishment. No incident in this entire story occurred by chance. All was part of a divine scheme.<sup>5</sup> Joseph, according to Abravanel, tells them that if he were not in Egypt, their sheep and cows would have died. They, their wives and their children would have starved. This was certainly no small deliverance, but rather a very great miracle. The brothers served as instruments of God's will.

In Genesis 45:8, three descriptive words are used of Joseph: "Now you will know that it was not you who sent me here but God; and he had made me a father to Pharaoh, a lord of all his household and ruler over the whole land of Egypt." According to Abravanel, the brothers sold Joseph in order to prevent his being the loved son. God, on the other hand, intended that Joseph be loved and therefore made him a surrogate father to Pharaoh. Just as a father guides and advises a son, Joseph guided and advised Pharaoh. The brothers did not want Joseph to sit in their father's house like a lord while they worked in the fields like slaves. God made Joseph lord over all of Pharaoh's house. The brothers removed Joseph from the house; God put him in charge as master of Pharaoh's house. The brothers rejected Joseph as their ruler; God made Joseph ruler over Egypt. All of this proves God's providence controlled this entire matter; none of the events happened by chance. Joseph tells his brothers that in order for God's plan to come to fruition, they must inform their father that Joseph is alive and bring him to Egypt immediately. He himself cannot leave Egypt; he must stay to govern the people.

He proposes that this father and brothers should dwell in Goshen instead of in Egypt proper, because Egypt is an abomination, since it is the place of the King's Temple, where there is theft, prostitution, and other unseemly activities. The land of Goshen is not distant; he will be able to visit them once a week. No harm will befall them there. Joseph is concerned that the family be close together. Goshen is an ideal location, a vast land, good for grazing. It is not like their home in Canaan where the brothers had to journey to Shechem in order to graze the flocks. If they were to remain in Canaan, robbers might steal the food they were carrying to their families. There is also the possibility that the king might not approve of Joseph's giving food to people in a distant land.

When the brothers finally replied, they spoke out of love and not shame or embarrassment. Joseph then embraced and kissed Benjamin, for Benjamin was of the same mother as Joseph, and he had greatly missed him. But hearing and speaking were not enough. Joseph showed his face and kissed his other brothers, in hope of making an impression upon them. Abravanel insists that only because of God's providence did the brothers also find favor with Pharaoh and his servants.

Why, Abravanel asks, does Joseph require special permission from Pharaoh to use the chariots?<sup>7</sup> The answer is that in those days, chariots were employed primarily in time of war. They were a royal discretion and no man was permitted to use them without the king's consent. Pharaoh looked forward to meeting Jacob, for he reasoned that the



father of a great man must himself be outstanding.

Preparing his brothers for their journey to their father, Joseph gave them new clothing, for fine clothes indicate honor and dignity. He knew that Jacob would rejoice at seeing them dressed so beautifully.<sup>8</sup> Joseph was very generous in his gifts to his brothers and their families, but when he saw that the brothers were becoming too comfortable, he told them not to remain, but to go and bring back their father. Joseph accompanied the brothers for a little part of the journey. This is indicative of his modesty and humility. It was a magnanimous gesture for an official of the land to accompany his subjects for any part of their journey.<sup>9</sup>

CHAPTER XVIII

MALBIM: JOSEPH REVEALS HIS IDENTITY

Malbim asks: If Joseph had cleared the room of all his stewards, how then could the Egyptians hear Joseph's sobs? <sup>1</sup> Malbim answers that when Joseph cried out, "Cause every man to go out from me!" he was already weeping. Therefore, the Egyptians heard Joseph crying, but they did not understand why. <sup>2</sup> Abravanel, on the other hand, is more concerned with why Joseph cried and not how the Egyptians knew that he was crying.

The text tells us that after Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, they were dumbfounded. Malbim observes that they reacted in this manner because they were afraid that Joseph would take revenge against them. According to Malbim, Joseph thought that they did not answer him for one of three reasons:

1. They did not believe that he was Joseph.
2. They still hated him, and they were sorry that he selling him to Egypt, they had facilitated his rise to power.
3. They were truly sorry and grieved that they had sold their brother as a slave. <sup>3</sup>

Responding to their silence, as he understood it, Joseph first proclaimed that he was their brother whom they had sold to Egypt. Secondly, Joseph told the brothers not to be saddened for having sold their brother into slavery in Egypt, nor to be angry with themselves for having sold him into slavery at all for a higher purpose was served by their deed. Malbim has Joseph saying that if they still hate him, it

must be that they are angry for two reasons:

1. They are afraid that Joseph will do evil to them.
2. They are angry because Joseph's greatness and high position in Egypt indicate that their design to avenge themselves upon him had failed.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, Joseph tells his brothers that his being in Egypt is all part of a divine plan and that they should not continue to be afraid.

In addition, says Malbim, if they are still angry with what they considered his youthful transgressions, it would not be to their advantage. They will be receiving favors from Joseph for the rest of their lives. In other words, they would become dependent upon him for sustenance since five years of famine remain. What alternative do they have? They would starve. Therefore, they should accept the fact that God sent Joseph before them to be a means of saving life. All of this should mollify the brothers' desire to take revenge.<sup>5</sup>

Abravanel does not delve into the minds of the brothers as deeply as does Malbim. Both agree that the brothers acted as God's tools in His plan to deliver Jacob and his sons from starvation. Abravanel allows us to see more of Joseph's character in his revelation to his brothers. Abravanel points out Joseph's concern for his brothers' dignity in calling them close together and only then reminding them of what they had

done to him. Abravanel's Joseph is a sensitive human being. He tells us that Joseph cried because he was proud to see his brothers, and that he respected them and thought them to be superior human beings. He cried, too, when he thought of the long period of separation. Malbim does not stress the human side of Joseph.<sup>6</sup>

After revealing himself to his brothers, Joseph explains to them why they should settle in Egypt. Malbim tells us that it was impossible for Joseph to leave Egypt in order to resettle his father in Goshen. As ruler, he cannot leave the country. He will give them a permanent place in which to live. He alleviates their fears by assuring them that they will not dwell among the Egyptians, who are idol worshippers, but that they will find homes solely in Goshen, which are free of idolatry. Not only will they be close to Joseph but to their livestock as well. Joseph well remembered how the brothers had to graze the sheep in Shechem far from home. Here in Goshen their sheep and flocks can remain in close proximity to them.<sup>7</sup> If they were to live in Canaan it would be impossible for him to sustain them, for the people of Egypt might resent his sending money outside the country. He bids them not to despair, but to bring their father and Benjamin back to Egypt with them. Aside from what he is saying to them, they can see for themselves that he is in a position to do as he says; he is held in high esteem by the citizens of Egypt. Although at times people dislike their ruler because of his cruelty, and plot revenge against him, Joseph

is loved and respected.<sup>8</sup>

Malbim discusses Joseph's power. According to Egyptian custom, the second-in-command had the right to permit aliens to live in Egypt for only a limited period. Only Pharaoh could allow aliens to become citizens and to dwell in the land permanently. Therefore, in Genesis 45:17, Pharaoh tells Joseph that he can give his brothers permission to reside in Egypt for a short period of time, until the famine would have subsided. Pharaoh did not tell Joseph that he might allow his family to reside in the land permanently. Therefore, Joseph had only limited authority, by which he could welcome transients and provide them with their needs. On the other hand, Pharaoh, by his royal prerogative, permits the brothers to take a wagon back with them to Canaan. Malbim says that this act shows that Pharaoh intends the brothers to be citizens of Egypt and to remain there permanently. This definition of Joseph's authority is given only by Malbim.<sup>9</sup>

Abbravanel points out that only by royal authority could one use the king's chariots. Pharaoh gave the brothers his chariots because he wanted to meet Jacob. He reasoned that if the son of this man were so great, the father must be even greater.<sup>10</sup> Malbim does not indicate why Pharaoh granted the use of royal chariots.

At first, Joseph could allow them to take only part of their possessions. But now, according to Malbim, they did not have to worry for they were going to be citizens of the land and settle there permanently.



Malbim differentiates between two synonyms ta'an and amas both mean to bear a burden. The former signifies a light burden, and the latter a heavy burden. Therefore, Malbim explains that since they knew that they could return, they took only part of the food back with them to Canaan. Therefore, when they loaded up their beasts with a light burden, they indicated they would soon return to Egypt.<sup>11</sup>

Before the brothers left Egypt, Joseph gave them clothes, money and transportation. Abravanel says that Joseph accompanied his brothers for a short part of the journey. Once again, he portrays the human character of Joseph. He tells us about Joseph modesty and humility as revealed by his accompanying his subjects.<sup>12</sup> We do not see this in Malbim's analysis of the same material. He is much more concerned with understanding the exact meaning of the text rather than in delving into the personalities of the characters.

## CHAPTER XIX

ABRAVANEL: JACOB'S JOURNEY

When the brothers returned home from Egypt and reported what had taken place, Jacob's heart stopped. He could not believe what his sons were telling him. However, the wagons which Joseph had given them were visible proof to Jacob that someone of great importance had dealt with them.

When Jacob finally accepted the good news, his first thought was to visit his son Joseph immediately. He was not concerned about sustaining himself. His love for Joseph transcended all other considerations. However, Jacob had no desire to remain in Egypt. He thought that he would go to Egypt, see his son, and then return home to Canaan. Jacob did not want to go to Egypt to learn of his son's eminence, nor did he want Joseph to support him. Jacob simply desired to set eyes upon Joseph whom he had not seen in over twenty years.

Why, Abravanel asks, does God tell Jacob not to fear about going to Egypt when he had already decided that he would travel to Egypt to see Joseph?<sup>1</sup> Because Abravanel answers, Jacob was afraid of the journey to Egypt for a number of reasons. First, he feared that the land would be filled with idols, and that consequently God's presence would not be there as it was in Canaan. Second, he feared that he might die and be buried in Egypt and not in the Cave of Machpelah like his father. Third, he feared that perhaps Joseph might die and the father's joy would become unbearable grief. Isaac had been warned not to go to Egypt

because it was full of magic, sorcery, and idols which destroy the fullness of the intellect. On the other hand, Abraham had not been warned about this since he did not then possess God's providence. Only after Isaac had been circumcised and bound was God's providence united in his seed in the chosen land. It was therefore forbidden for Isaac or any of his descendents to go to Egypt. As a result, Jacob feared to go until God said to him, "Do not be afraid, go down to Egypt." <sup>2</sup>

Abravanel explains the reason for God's speaking twice to Jacob when one communication would have sufficed. Abravanel says that the first communication in Genesis 46:3 means that God will not depart from Jacob, that his Providence will always be with him. The second communication indicates that it is permissible to go to Egypt despite what God had told Isaac. God will accompany Jacob to Egypt. Moreover, Jacob is not to fear that his sons and their descendents will not return to the land of Canaan.

The text tells us that Jacob sent Judah ahead to Joseph in order that he might show Judah the way to Goshen.<sup>3</sup> Now, Abravanel asks, can this be when Jacob and the brothers had already arrived in Goshen? The reason Judah came to Joseph was not to secure Joseph as a guide, but rather that Judah might show Joseph precisely where his father was, since Jacob had already arrived in Goshen. As soon as Joseph heard that Jacob was in Goshen, he imme-

diately readied his chariot, without the aid of his servants, and went to meet his father. Joseph travelled in his chariot, his face covered with a turban as was the custom of the Egyptian kings. He was not recognized by his father and his brothers until he removed his turban. Then Jacob fell on Joseph's shoulder and wept more copiously than when he had been in mourning for his son.<sup>4</sup> He said to Joseph: I can die in happiness, now that I have seen you alive. Jacob's joy is not derived from Joseph's high position in Egypt, but because he had been reunited with his beloved son. The wise Joseph tells the father that he must not delay in Goshen, but must go to tell Pharaoh of Jacob's coming. Joseph was aware that it would be better for him to inform Pharaoh personally rather than through an emissary.<sup>5</sup> Not only was Joseph diplomatic, he was also merciful and compassionate. He told his brothers that he was going to tell Pharaoh of their coming. Joseph knew that if he told his father as well, Jacob might worry about whether his family would be permitted to remain in Goshen. Joseph told his brothers that he would speak with Pharaoh in such a manner that Pharaoh would give the land of Goshen to them. First, he would announce the arrival of his kin. Then he would say that these men are shepherds, keepers of livestock in their native land of Canaan. Finally he would add that they had brought with them their flocks, herds, and all their possessions. Joseph senses that it would be better if he did

not have to ask Pharaoh directly. He knows that it would be much more significant if Pharaoh, himself, would suggest that the family settle in Goshen. All of this demonstrates Joseph's shrewdness. Joseph told the brothers that if his plan did not induce Pharaoh to say what Joseph wanted, then Joseph would manipulate Pharaoh in such a manner as to make Pharaoh to ask the brothers what occupation they followed. Joseph instructed the brothers to respond that they are herdsmen. This will indicate that they are honorable and wealthy men, demonstrate their economic independence, and negate any fear that they are indigent aliens seeking support from the royal treasury. They are then to suggest that since shepherds are unwelcome in Egypt, perhaps Goshen would be a more suitable area in which to settle.

When Joseph actually approaches Pharaoh and makes his request, he uses different language than that which he had employed with his brothers. Joseph simply tells Pharaoh that his father and brothers have arrived in the land of Egypt. He does not indicate that they have come to see him. Why, Abravanel asks does Joseph change the speech he had prepared? He answers that Joseph did not want Pharaoh to think that the brothers had come to Egypt to seek aid from the royal coffers. The purpose, of course, was to show Pharaoh that Joseph's family was self-supporting and would not ask sustenance from Pharaoh.<sup>6</sup>

Abravanel asks: "Why does the text repeat the phrase: וַיֵּלֶךְ יוֹסֵף ? <sup>7</sup> He replies that this is not redundant. The



first use of the word indicates that the brothers were hoping that Pharaoh would permit them to settle in Goshen. However, he did not respond to the ploy that they and their ancestors were shepherds. The brothers, perceiving that Pharaoh had not taken the bait, were forced to speak again and to explain to him exactly what they were requesting.<sup>8</sup>

Once again, Abravanel portrays Pharaoh as clever and shrewd. Pharaoh understands what Joseph and his brothers are doing. Therefore, he tells Joseph; since they have come to you for help, I do not want to give them the land which they seek. However, I want you to give it to them because this will demonstrate your prestige. Since Joseph did not want to do this himself, he waits for the king to announce the gift. Therefore, Pharaoh tells them explicitly that they have permission to dwell in Goshen. Abravanel insists that Pharaoh's charging Joseph to place capable men of his acquaintance in charge of Pharaoh's livestock indicates that sheep and cattle were not an abomination in Egypt. Otherwise Pharaoh would not own any.<sup>9</sup>

After Pharaoh has finished with the brothers, he asks Jacob as the text seems to imply, his age.<sup>10</sup> Abravanel says that Pharaoh is really making a statement about how great and magnificent are Jacob's years; how experienced he is in life. Jacob, in turn, replies that his hair is white, not from old age, but from troubles which he has endured throughout his journeys.<sup>11</sup>

CHAPTER XX

MALBIM: JACOB'S JOURNEY

When the brothers returned home and told Jacob that Joseph was second-in-command to Pharaoh, Jacob replied: The mere fact that my son is still alive is significant to me. You also tell me that he has a position of authority. The former statement is enough for me.<sup>1</sup> Both Abravanel and Malbim agree that Jacob had no intention of settling in Egypt. He wanted to go there merely to see his son Joseph and then return to Canaan. According to Malbim since Jacob had no intention of remaining in Egypt, but intended only to visit Joseph and return, he did not travel in the wagons which were sent to him for the purpose of facilitating a permanent move.<sup>2</sup> When Jacob arrived at Beer Sheva, he offered sacrifices to God, reasoning that since God had warned his father Isaac not to go down to Egypt, he too must not remain in Egypt permanently. God promptly replied that His blessings would be with Jacob as they had been with his father Isaac. Malbim tells us that Jacob feared going to Egypt for six specific reasons. In each instance, God reassures him not to fear. Jacob feared:

1. His sons must assimilate in Egypt.  
God's response was that the sons would become a nation.
2. His descendants would diminish in number. God's response was that not only will they become a nation, they would become a great and numerous nation.

3. God would not be with him. God's response was that He would accompany Jacob to Egypt.
4. He would be buried in Egypt. God's response was that He would allow Jacob to be buried in the Cave of Machpeleh.
5. His children would remain in Egypt forever. God's response was that they would also leave at the time of the redemption.
6. Finally, Jacob feared that Joseph might die during his own lifetime. God replied that Joseph would care for Jacob during the time he was there.<sup>3</sup>

Abravanel also enumerates Jacob's fears of the journey. However, his list of reasons is not as extensive as that of Malbim. Of the three reasons which Abravanel cites, Malbim agrees with two. However, Abravanel observes that Jacob feared going to Egypt because the land of Egypt might be corrupted with idol-worship, and God's presence might not be found there as it was in Canaan.<sup>4</sup> Malbim makes no mention of this.

Only after God had alleviated Jacob's fear of traveling, according to Malbim, does Jacob decide that he will settle in Egypt. Thereafter, Jacob traveled with all of his belongings

in the wagons Pharaoh had provided. Previously Jacob had not made any use of the wagons. Malbim tells us that only after Jacob had decided to leave Canaan to settle in Egypt, did Jacob and the brothers take all their livestock and possessions with them to Egypt.<sup>5</sup>

Malbim points out that in Genesis 46:7 there appears to be a redundancy in the text. According to v.6, Jacob and all of his offspring came with him to Egypt. According to v.7, Jacob brought his sons and grandsons, his daughters, granddaughters, and all his offspring. Malbim writes that v.6 is to be understood in the following manner: True, all of the offspring went down to Egypt. But only the sons were not afraid of going to Egypt, for they knew that they would not be in servitude, though their descendants would be enslaved. Therefore, the sons went willingly. But Jacob's grandchildren, the offspring of the sons, were afraid and went unwillingly.<sup>6</sup> This is Malbim's unique insight; Abravanel makes no mention of it. Therefore, Malbim takes what appears to be simple parallelism found so frequently in the Bible and chooses to give meaning to each part of the verse.

Unlike Abravanel, Malbim does not emphasize Joseph's fine attributes. Abravanel tells us that Joseph, in his wisdom, told Jacob that he must not delay in informing Pharaoh of their coming. Joseph, a shrewd and clever politician, understood that it would be better that he himself tell Pharaoh, rather than for someone else. Abravanel informs us how merciful and compassionate Joseph is in only telling

his brothers that he was going to tell Pharaoh of their arrival. For in his great wisdom, Joseph understands that if he tells his father, Jacob might worry and he did not want this to happen.<sup>7</sup> Malbim does not stress Joseph's cleverness as clearly as Abravanel does. Malbim tells us that Joseph needed permission from Pharaoh to settle his brothers and family in one specific place. Joseph feared that Pharaoh might command that they dwell in the royal cities and that he might appoint them chiefs in his government. Therefore, Joseph told his brothers what to say to Pharaoh in order that Pharaoh might give them the land of Goshen. This demonstrates Joseph's shrewdness. He told them that he would inform Pharaoh that they were shepherds, because he knew that Egypt abhorred shepherds. They were to add that they were sheepherders in order that Pharaoh might not think that the brothers were indigent and would require support on the public dole. In order to prove that they could maintain themselves, Joseph told Pharaoh that his family had brought their livestock with them. Abravanel says that Joseph tells the brothers what to say in the event that Pharaoh does not acquiesce to Joseph's requests.<sup>8</sup> Malbim suggests that Joseph told the brothers what to say in order to protect them from becoming functionaries in the Egyptian government. Therefore he instructs them to say that their profession is dealing with livestock, and that they do not know any other business. Malbim says that Joseph did not tell them to say that they are shepherds, for this would imply that they graze the flock themselves. Rather, Joseph told them to say



that they trade in sheep and cattle but do not do the actual labor. In this way, Joseph reasons, they stand to benefit. It was considered an abomination to be shepherds in Egypt. Therefore, Pharaoh would have to find a suitable place for them and it would be Goshen.<sup>10</sup>

Malbim tells us that Joseph did not tell Pharaoh immediately that the brothers had come to settle permanently in the land, merely that the brothers had come from Canaan. At that point, Joseph appointed five of his brothers to tell Pharaoh of their specific intentions. The brothers spoke twice to Pharaoh. Malbim says that the first time, Pharaoh initiated the conversation by asking a question. The second time the brothers initiated the exchange.<sup>11</sup> Abravanel says that the reason why the text says they spoke the second time because Pharaoh did not respond to their ploy.<sup>12</sup>

According to Malbim, Pharaoh did not really grant the brothers anything other than that which he allowed any stranger to do. Pharaoh told them that they could dwell in the land until the famine ceased. In other words, they could remain for a short period, for which executive approval was not required. Like Abravanel, Malbim implies that Pharaoh was shrewd and that he really understood Joseph's intentions. Therefore, when Pharaoh answered Joseph, he was saying: I know that your family did not really come to settle in Egypt. Malbim makes Pharaoh say to Joseph that he (Joseph) need not ask for permission. The land of Egypt is under Joseph's control and he may therefore place his family wherever he desires.<sup>13</sup>

Abravanel points out a discrepancy in Genesis 47:6: "And if you know any capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock." If livestock were an abomination, how could Pharaoh have owned livestock?<sup>14</sup> Malbim ignores the problem. In Genesis 47:8, Pharaoh asks Jacob's age. Both Malbim and Abravanel comment on Pharaoh's question and Jacob's reply. Malbim says that Jacob differentiated between two terms. The first y'mai sh'nei chayecha and y'mai sh'nei m'guri. According to Malbim, Jacob first answers a question which Pharaoh did not ask. Malbim understands y'mai sh'nei chayecha to mean the spiritual and intellectual years of Jacob's life. The term y'mai sh'nei m'guri signifies chronological age. According to the text, Jacob's first answer was that his earthly years are one hundred and thirty, but his spiritual and intellectual years are few in number as compared with his forefathers. During their years they were able to devote more time to worshipping their God. Malbim also says that y'mai sh'nei chayav signify the happy and successful years, and Jacob replies that those years are few in number.<sup>15</sup>

Abravanel stresses Pharaoh's question and not Jacob's answer. Pharaoh was really making a statement: How great and magnificent are Jacob's years.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the difference between the two commentators in this section is in the fact that Malbim chose to comment on Jacob's answer and Abravanel interpreted Pharaoh's statement.

## CHAPTER XXI

ABRAVANEL: JACOB IN EGYPT

Abravanel asks: "Why is it necessary for the text to tell us that Jacob lived seventeen years in the land of Egypt?"<sup>1</sup> Abravanel answers that originally Jacob had intended only to visit Joseph and then return to Canaan, yet in his lifetime Jacob never returned to Canaan. For this reason we are informed how many years Jacob lived in Egypt. God had told him in Beersheba that he would tarry in Egypt with all of his household and there he would die. Thus, this prophecy was fulfilled.

Abravanel quotes Nachmanides' comment: "We learn from Jacob that a man should not wait until he is physically ill to draft his will, because then he will not be able to think clearly. This is exactly why Jacob gave Joseph instructions concerning his burial.

Why, asks Abravanel, did Jacob call Joseph and not the other brothers? Abravanel accepts Rashi's explanation that Joseph had the capability and authority to execute Jacob's instructions. Abravanel cites the Midrash:<sup>2</sup> "It was Joseph who sent for his father to come to Egypt. Therefore, Joseph will be the one to return his father to the place from whence he came." Abravanel says that Jacob was able to see by means of his ruach hakodesh that Joseph's bones would remain in Egypt until Israel would be redeemed. Jacob felt that Joseph might decide to leave his father's body in Egypt until both father and son might be called out together. Therefore, Jacob commanded Joseph to bury him immediately outside Egypt and not to wait until the

time of redemption. Therefore, the text reads: "If you would please me, place your hand under my thigh as a pledge of your loyalty; pray do not bury me in Egypt." <sup>3</sup>

In doing this, Joseph was taking an oath: the hand is a symbol of transporting from one place to another. This is precisely what Joseph and his brothers are to do, to carry Jacob's coffin from Egypt to Canaan.

Abravanel asks: "What is the meaning of the word *na*? Why is it found twice in the same sentence?" <sup>4</sup> Abravanel explains that the word *na* is the equivalent of the word *now*, now. Therefore, Jacob is really saying that he does not want to be buried in Egypt now and later on reburied in Canaan. This accounts for the first *na*.

The second *na* signifies Jacob's actual request. In other words, Jacob is saying: "Take me and immediately allow me to lie with my fathers." Joseph, in turn, answers that he would obey his father's wishes.

Abravanel cites the Midrash <sup>5</sup> which says that Joseph remarked to Jacob: "I see how much it means to you to be buried in Israel. Therefore, I, too, will carry out your words. Upon my death, I will also request to be buried outside of Egypt." <sup>6</sup>

Jacob, who was now an old and sick man, anticipated his death. He therefore went to his sons and grandsons in order to bless them, but he feels stronger when he is about to bless Joseph's sons. After having blessed Ephraim and Menasseh, Jacob blessed Joseph. The father intended to



remove from Reuben the privilege of the first-born son and to transfer it to Joseph. Because this might appear to be a distortion of justice, Jacob explains that he was inspired to do this by the angel who had appeared to him at Luz when he was coming from Laban's house. <sup>7</sup>

Why does the text tell us about Rachel's burial place precisely when Jacob is blessing Joseph's sons? <sup>8</sup> Abravanel replies: Jacob tells Joseph that because Jacob had not been able to bury Rachel in Machpelah, Joseph had been slighted. To compensate, Joseph's children will have the advantage of being like Jacob's sons. Jacob, according to Abravanel, feels that Ephraim will be the progenitor of a separate tribe because Rachel had been buried on the way to Ephrat, and Ephraim's name is a derivation of Ephrat. <sup>9</sup>

Jacob gave Joseph three gifts when he made Joseph's sons the progenitors of future tribes. First, he gave Joseph respect, glory, and great heliness. Second, Jacob was telling Joseph that his sons and descendents would be as numerous as the descendents of the other brothers in toto, since each of Joseph's sons will have found a separate tribe. They will receive two individual portions of inheritance, as opposed to Joseph's siring one tribe and only receiving one share of inheritance.

Jacob was old and nearly sightless. He did not recognize the people who were near him. Therefore, he asked Joseph: "Who are these people who stand near us and listen to our secrets?" When Joseph heard the secrets which Jacob



then revealed, he said: "These are my children whom God has given me." Then Joseph placed his sons on his father's lap. Later on, he removed them from Jacob, because he thought they were too heavy for his father to bear. Once again, we see Joseph, the perfect man, the considerate son who is worried about his infirm father. Joseph now brings them closer to their grandfather who blesses them with a three-fold blessing.<sup>10</sup>

Why does Jacob use all of this descriptive language in his blessing? What do the three statements indicate?<sup>11</sup> First, that the one who is to be blessed will walk upright in the path of God, and that he will be successful. Second, that the person to be blessed will not have to worry about matters concerning time. Third, that the person to be blessed will be saved from those harmful incidents occurring outside of the land. Jacob prayed that Joseph's sons be granted these three blessings.<sup>12</sup>

By gematria Abravanel refers that Jacob wants God to sustain Joseph's sons for as long as God has sustained him; namely, one hundred and forty-seven years. He plays with the words רנן and ננן in Genesis 48:15. The word רנן in gematria equals one hundred and thirty, and the word ננן equals seventeen. Altogether this equals one hundred and forty-seven.

Why does Jacob say that an angel will watch over and protect the lads? The angel, answers Abravanel, is the instrument of God's providence. The ancestors were watched

over by God's providence. When Jacob says that Joseph's sons will be recalled in his name, he meant that the two of them will be equal to all the rest of the tribes. They will not only be recalled through his name, but also will be great and fruitful on this earth.

Why is Joseph grieved when his father places his right hand on Ephraim's head instead of on **Manasseh's** head, since as the elder, **Manasseh** deserves the better blessing? Joseph thought Jacob's error was directly attributable to his failing health, which is similar to Nahmanides' comment. Therefore Joseph was saddened. However, Jacob, wise and as astute as always, says to Joseph: "I know why I am doing this. I know why I gave an equal blessing to both of them. If the blessing is equal, then **Manasseh** will also be a great nation and grow in population. However, the younger brother will be greater than he, and to indicate this I crossed my hands and put my right on Ephraim's head." Jacob was shrewder than Joseph had surmised.<sup>13</sup> Joseph wonders: "If the blessings are equal, then why did Jacob cross his hands?" Abravanel suggests that the blessing is to be understood in two parts: The first is an equal blessing; namely, both will be great nations. The second deals only with Ephraim. Although **Manasseh** will be a great nation, Ephraim will be an even greater one.

Therefore, Jacob knew exactly what he was doing when he blessed the younger one with his right hand. In order that jealousy and hatred would not be perpetuated between

Ephraim and Manasseh, Jacob added to the first part of the blessing the words, "May God make you like Manasseh." In this way the elder would not feel that he had been slighted.<sup>14</sup>

## CHAPTER XXII

MALBIM: JACOB IN EGYPT

Genesis 47:28 tells us that Jacob lived seventeen of his one hundred and forty-seven years in Egypt. Abravanel asks why this is stated.<sup>1</sup> He answers that Jacob had intended only to visit Joseph and then return to Canaan, but Jacob never returned to Canaan during his lifetime.<sup>2</sup> Malbim offers a totally different explanation. These last seventeen years were most fulfilling and successful for Jacob. Before Jacob came to Egypt, he had lived in pain and sorrow. When he came to Egypt, he became a complete human being. His final years were spent in happiness and contentment.<sup>3</sup> For this reason we are told that Jacob lived seventeen years in Egypt. Malbim says at the end of a person's life all of his days are measured. When one has suffered, it is difficult to forget past troubles. Nevertheless, Malbim suggests, one should direct one's thoughts to those few moments which were spent in happiness. Even though Jacob had suffered so much during his lifetime, we are to remember Jacob as if the years of his life were years of success and fulfillment.<sup>4</sup>

Jacob, with death approaching, calls Joseph in order to instruct him about his funeral. Malbim says that Jacob's request was addressed to two people: Joseph in both his capacity, as his son and as Prime Minister of Egypt.<sup>5</sup>

Jacob speaks to Joseph the Prime Minister:

- a. If I have found favor in your eyes.
- b. Deal with me compassionately.

Jacob to Joseph the son:

- a. Place your hand under my thigh and

take an oath.

- b. For you are obligated as my son to fulfill my request out of respect for your father.
- c. For you must fulfill this oath, since once it has been sworn, it represents truth.<sup>6</sup>

Malbim, like Abravanel, points out that Jacob is instructing Joseph not to bury him in Egypt even for an hour, but to bury him immediately in the land of his father. Malbim cites three reasons for Jacob's wanting to be buried in Canaan. He says that Eretz Yisrael is a holy place and that is where his fathers are buried. He tells Joseph to take him from an impure land to a pure and spiritual home. Third, he wants to be buried in the Cave of Machpelah, and this would require Joseph's taking his father's body from Egypt to Hebron.<sup>7</sup>

In his commentary on Genesis 47:29-30 Malbim portrays Joseph as a good and responsible son. Joseph tells his father that he would rather not have to make an oath, he promises to fulfill his father's wishes. Instead, says Joseph, it would be much better if he would voluntarily fulfill his father's request out of a sense of respect and honor. If he must take an oath, this implies that he is forced to fulfill Jacob's request. Joseph would prefer not to be obligated by an oath. He wants to appear as a concerned son who cares for his aged father. Nevertheless, Joseph swore in order to satisfy Jacob. This oath was simply a sign for Jacob who in



turn would feel that his son would not forsake him.

When the aged Jacob became ill, Joseph was notified. With his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim, he visits his father. Malbim explains that as long as Jacob lives, he has the right to give the land of Canaan as a gift to whomever he chooses. Only if he had died, would the land automatically become the property of his sons. Therefore, Malbim explains, Genesis 48:4 indicates that God will give the land to Jacob's descendants as an everlasting possession. It was not understood as a personal inheritance but rather a generic possession. Both Malbim and Abravanel try to account for the fact that both Ephraim and Manasseh were entitled to a portion of the future inheritance.

When it came time for Jacob to bless Joseph's children, both Malbim and Abravanel tell us that Jacob did not recognize his grandchildren. Ephraim and Manasseh were both dressed in royal attire, as was the custom of the children of Egyptian noblemen. Malbim also points out that even if they had been dressed in non-royal garb, Jacob probably would not have recognized them for Egyptian dress was different from that of the Hebrews.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, Jacob, surprised, asked: Who are these people standing in the room with us? Joseph replies that these are his righteous and God-fearing children. The reasons for the children's different apparel is because of my position in the land of Egypt. The aforementioned is Malbim's understanding of this episode. Malbim explains that when Jacob blessed Ephraim and Manasseh, he was very much aware of what

he was doing. Jacob knew well that Manasseh was the oldest and Ephraim was the youngest. To prove this, Jacob lifted his left hand above his right hand. However, Jacob was cognizant of the fact that Ephraim was being blessed with his right hand and Manasseh with his left.<sup>10</sup> Malbim says that there are two types of divine behavior. In one instance God employs natural law to influence worldly events, and in the other he supercedes nature. Jacob believed that God had employed supernatural means in dealing with Abraham and Isaac. In other words, God performed miracles and wondrous deeds for them. Jacob believed that God's behavior toward him was within the context of nature.<sup>11</sup>

Malbim says that Jacob said to both Ephraim and Manasseh that these two types of phenomena would be with them. This is the general portion, so to speak, of the blessing. There was a specific reason, according to Malbim, for Jacob's blessing Ephraim with the right hand and Manasseh with the left. Ephraim's greatness will live in his greater qualities. In other words, God will perform miracles for him and do great wonders at Ephraim's behest. This is all signified in Jacob's right hand. Manasseh will be a great nation and will have to rely on its own power. Another difference is that Ephraim's blessing will take effect immediately, but Manasseh's blessing of becoming a great nation will not come to fruition until a later time. Therefore, when Jacob said that he knew what he was doing he said: I know that Manasseh will not become a great nation until later. But he will then be great in number. How-

ever, Ephraim will be greater, not in numbers, but in superior qualities and attributes of holiness. For one of Ephraim's descendants will be equal in attributes to the numbers of great nations. This will be Joshua.<sup>12</sup>

Both Abravanel and Malbim take for granted that Jacob is astute and shrewd. He is in full control of his mind. Abravanel explains that there are two parts to the blessing. The first part is that Ephraim and Manasseh will both be great nations. The second part is that Ephraim will be the greater of the two nations.<sup>13</sup> Malbim says that Ephraim will be greater, not in numbers, but in qualities and attributes of holiness. This is the advantage which Malbim sees Ephraim to acquire in relation to his brother Manasseh.

## CHAPTER XXIII

ABRAVANEL: JACOB'S TESTAMENT

After Jacob had blessed Joseph's sons and had given Joseph instructions about his burial, Jacob called together the remainder of his family. The wise father realized that if he communicated his final wishes only to Joseph, dissention would spread through the family.

In Genesis 49:1-2, we find two words which mean to gather.

Why, Abravanel asks does the text employ different terms to express the same idea? The first, "heasfu," is a more general term.

Jacob knowing the brothers' mutual suspicion realized that he had to address them as a group. Therefore, he gathered them together.

The second term "hekabtzu" is a more intimate term which is indicative of an intense conferring between Jacob and his sons for the purpose of reassuring them. Therefore, the necessity for employing two terms in this section of the text.

He says, "Come closer and listen to your father, Israel, the man who wrestled with God and with man, the man who is your flesh and blood. Come now and give heed, for these are words of depth and of prophesy." In addition, by gathering together, they will merit a blessing, as the sons of Abraham and Isaac did not.

Jacob was able to see through his power of prophecy that his seed would be fruitful. He therefore felt it incumbent upon himself to explain to his sons which of the

twelve tribes would reign in Israel. Jacob's desire was to appoint a leader and ruler in order to prevent any conflicts.

Therefore, Jacob made an investigation into the character of each of his sons in order to determine who was worthy of assuming the role of leader in Israel. Jacob knew that the descendants of the leader of this tribe would inherit their progenitor's positive attributes, because the deeds of the fathers are a sign to the children.<sup>1</sup> Jacob called the brothers together, not for the purpose of revealing their future, not for the sake of blessing them, not to rebuke, nor to tell them of their forthcoming inheritance of the Land, but rather to inform them of their status within the hierarchy of Israel. Jacob recalled in each one of them the traits of each and the future of their offspring. The Torah does not give us this information. In fact, it implies that Jacob is blessing his sons as the last testament of a father.

According to Abravanel, Jacob begins his "investigation" with Reuben, the oldest of the brothers. Jacob tells him that there is an advantage in being the oldest and the strongest. This would be very important and valuable in a kingdom. However, Reuben is unstable, like water, and **frivolous**. He will excel no longer for he does not deserve the advantage of primogeniture, since he lacks discernment. Jacob's revelation to Reuben is that Reuben would not be the first born for the purpose of assuming leadership. Abravanel cites Chronicles<sup>2</sup> to the effect that the kingship did not go to



Reuben because he was unworthy of it.

Jacob then investigates the character of Simeon and Levi, the two next oldest children, who share similar traits. Jacob tells them that all their thoughts and actions are violent. (Jacob is referring to the Dinah episode of Genesis 38.) He would have thanked them if they had killed only those who had raped their sister, but they slaughtered an entire city in order to loot and pillage. Jacob is also thinking of what Korach and the sons of Levi did to Moses. Therefore Jacob says: Simeon and Levi will not be together in their inheritance. Simeon will share a portion of the inheritance. Simeon will share a portion of the inheritance with the remainder of the Tribes; he will not have a portion for his descendants.

To the sons of Levi Jacob says: "I will scatter you in Israel." <sup>3</sup> The forty-eight cities of refuge were for the Levites who were scattered amongst the lands of the tribes.) Jacob perceived that Simeon and Levi were not worthy of the kingship because of their violent natures.<sup>4</sup> This is contrary to the biblical injunction: "A king will rule in justice and not in violence." <sup>5</sup> Their seed will be scattered among the other tribes.

These words of Jacob are not his own. In reality, they constitute the Word of God. Had they been Jacob's, he would have given the kingship to Joseph and not Judah, for he loved Joseph more than Judah. His next choice would have been Benjamin, whom he loved more than Judah because

Benjamin was his youngest son. But this was God's will, and Jacob was His prophet. God wanted Jacob to inform Reuben, Simeon, and Levi about their evil deeds to teach them that revenge leads to sin. Jacob does not mention anything about the Tribe of Levi serving in the Temple, for this function is bestowed upon them after the sin of the Golden Calf.

Joseph then addresses himself to Judah, assuring him that he possesses the qualities of kingship:

1. The brothers will not be jealous of him, for Judah will acknowledge them.
2. Judah will be victorious in battle, and therefore it is fitting that he fight God's wars. So the text indicates: "All of your enemies will flee from you and you will pursue them and catch up with them." <sup>6</sup> Because of this the brothers will respect him.
3. Judah is not sinful and bitter like Simeon and Levi, nor is he unstable like Reuben. Judah is righteous, honest, and nonviolent. (Abravanel says that perhaps the text is referring to Judah's urging the brothers not to kill Joseph.)
4. In Judah are found the qualities of stability and courage like these of

the lion. Abravanel explains that Judah possesses all the good traits of the lion.

For these reasons, the kingship will not depart from Judah, and, says Abravanel, the tribe of Judah will last until the messianic-king comes and will gather all peoples together to serve him. Abravanel continues to explain Jacob's prophecy to Judah by saying that the land of Judah will be full of vineyards, sheep, and cattle. In other words, there will be an abundance of everything.<sup>7</sup>

After having spoken with Judah, Jacob tells Zebulun that he will be a successful sea merchant, and therefore he will be unworthy of the kingship.<sup>8</sup> Issachar is also unworthy of the kingship, since his people will be farmers, and they will pay tribute to the king in order to exempt themselves from combat. Jacob wants to differentiate between Zebulun who will be warlike and Issachar who will not be.<sup>9</sup>

Jacob then informs Dan that he is unworthy to rule, because he is not fit to judge any of the tribes except his own. A king must be able to judge all of the tribes, not only one. Not only will Dan be unable to judge the other tribes, but he will not have the courage to fight his enemies face-to-face. Dan will not reach the level of Judah, that of a lion, because Dan is a snake.<sup>10</sup>

Jacob then tells Gad that he is fit to serve the king, but not himself to be king. Jacob then informs Asher that his tribe likewise will not be suitable for the kingship,

for they will be workers for the king.<sup>12</sup>

Jacob foresees Naphtali as a faithful worker. He will always fulfill the orders of his master. The tribe of Naphtali are men of language and style. These are all good traits for counselors and diplomats, but not for the king himself.<sup>13</sup> It is noteworthy that Jacob places Zebulun before Issachar even though Issachar is older. Abravanel says that sea merchants are more important and more valuable than workers in the field who are frivolous.

Next in line is Joseph. Jacob reminds Joseph that he had been hated by his brothers, who had been jealous of him. Because of this Joseph is not as well-suited for the kingship as Judah. The king must depend upon his people's love. Since God did not want Joseph to merit the kingship, Joseph will merit other blessings. Here Jacob blesses Joseph as a separate tribe.<sup>14</sup>

Jacob tells Benjamin that he also is not fit to be king, for he is not a man of justice.<sup>15</sup> At the conclusion of his testament, Jacob says to his sons: "Even though some of you I esteem and some I despise, you are all tribes of Israel, all from honored stock and all are perfect in your deeds. Therefore, you are called tribes." According to Abravanel, Jacob first addressed each of his sons and, then blessed each separately.

Next, he instructed them about his burial,<sup>16</sup> because he feared that Pharaoh might not allow Joseph to travel to Canaan to bury his father. Therefore the brothers would

have to know what to do. Furthermore, seven years had elapsed since the brothers had come to Egypt and Jacob was concerned that his sons might not remember the Cave of Machpelah. Indeed, he worried that when the brothers would arrive at the Cave, the inhabitants of the area might ask, "What right do you have to it?" Therefore, Jacob explains fully about the Cave and its historical significance.

Abravanel asks: "Why does the text use the verb "Vayigva" instead of "Vayamut" to indicate Jacob's death? Abravanel cites a statement by Rabbi Yochanan with whom he concurs.

The statement reads:

In other words, the name of Jacob, Israel, will always live on. The people of Israel will never die.<sup>18</sup>

After Jacob's death Pharaoh granted Joseph and his brothers permission to bury their father in Canaan. However, Pharaoh was afraid that Joseph and his brothers might not return to Egypt. Therefore he sent his servants with them. He also ensured that the brothers would return by requiring them to leave their wives, children, and cattle in Goshen. Once again, Pharaoh is portrayed as a wise man, according to Abravanel.<sup>19</sup>

The respect accorded to Jacob in Egypt is illustrated by the fact that when the children of Esau saw a great entourage of horses for battle and weapons for war and mourning for a period of seven days, they thought that an Egyptian king was to be buried. They simply could not conceive that



a ceremony of such magnitude would be held for a commoner. Because of the protracted mourning (evel kaved), they called the name of this place evel mitzrayim.<sup>20</sup>

The brothers now worry about Joseph's attitude toward them, now that their father is no more. Joseph tells them that he will protect them and sustain them as God wills him to do, just as it was God's will for him to be set into his high position. Their fears allayed, they returned with Joseph to Egypt.<sup>21</sup>

Joseph was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. Why was he not buried in the Cave of Machpelah? Abravanel offers three reasons. First, Joseph knew that the Cave was reserved only for the patriarchs and their wives. Second, he did not want to demean his brothers by appropriating a privilege they could not share. Third, he knew that Pharaoh would not give his brothers permission to bury him outside Egypt. Joseph had done so much for Egypt that he could not refuse the honor of burial in Egyptian soil.<sup>22</sup>

In conclusion, we have seen three main characters: The first is Jacob, as the perfect man, seeking contentment, harmony, and wisdom. The second is Joseph, portrayed as a perfect man, singled out by his father because of his sensitive, intelligent, and moral nature. Finally, we see the brothers who are but instruments in God's plan, whose only guilt is that of their evil intentions. Abravanel views these characters in his commentary on Genesis 37, 39-50.



---

CHAPTER XXIV

MALBIM: JACOB'S TESTAMENT

Jacob, who is close to death, calls together his sons and gives them his final testament. Malbim, like Abravanel, distinguishes between the two roots meaning "to gather" in Genesis 49:1-2. The root kavatz means the coming together of people who had been scattered in various places; the root asaf describes their uniting into a group with a single purpose and goal.<sup>1</sup> Malbim cites the Midrash which says that the verb qavatz is invariably used to refer to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.<sup>2</sup> The verb asaf is used in regard to the others. Abravanel, on the other hand, says that asaf is a more general term,<sup>3</sup> which Jacob employed to alleviate his sons' fears. He could then proceed to speak with each about his destiny.<sup>4</sup>

The first son Jacob addresses is Reuben, the oldest. According to Malbim, Jacob tells him that as the oldest he has two definite advantages. First, because he is the first-born, he has a superior ability to rule; to be part of the **government**. In addition, he will command greater respect than the rest of his brothers. Second, because Reuben is the first of Jacob's progeny, he has an abundance of dignity and greatness. In addition, Reuben has the advantage of excelling in physical power and strength.<sup>5</sup> Malbim differentiates between two nouns meaning "strength," aven and koach. Malbim says that the term koach refers to inner strength or potential.<sup>6</sup> The term aven signifies the realization of this potential strength.<sup>7</sup> Therefore Reuben not only possesses the capability for strength but also the capacity to use it. Malbim

cites the rabbis who say that these qualities are priestly and royal qualities which Reuben should possess.<sup>8</sup> However, the text continues, Jacob then rebukes Reuben. He tells him that because he is as unstable as water he will not receive the rights and privileges of primogeniture, and will forfeit his superior qualities.<sup>9</sup>

After addressing Reuben, Jacob speaks to Simeon and Levi. Malbim tells us that after Jacob had told Reuben that he could not bestow the kingship upon him, Jacob should have given it to Simeon or Levi, the next oldest.<sup>10</sup> Jacob tells them that they are both unfit to rule because they are men who possess the faults of anger and vengefulness, qualities not befitting rulers. A leader with these flaws will destroy much human life; such a man personifies continuous violence.<sup>11</sup> Jacob reminds Simeon and Levi of their massacre of the city of Shechem as well as their treatment of their brother Joseph. Malbim explains that Jacob tells them that they feigned to honor his name by slaughtering the people of Shechem for the rape of Dinah.<sup>12</sup> However, they acted not because of a sense of justice but out of a desire for revenge. Not only did they pillage and loot but also destroyed a people. In this same manner, their anger was manifest against Joseph whom they wanted to kill. It was only because of Judah's intervention that Joseph was saved from death. Jacob continued to reprove them: At times, fury and rage must be appeased, and one must do justice to the wicked. But your anger is a curse, not a blessing, because it is not motivated by a desire for justice.<sup>13</sup> Malbim

again differentiates between two synonyms, evrah and af. He says that the word af refers to someone's anger against another human being who has offended him.<sup>14</sup> The word evrah refers to uncontrolled anger.<sup>15</sup> Therefore af refers to the anger against Shechem ben Hamor, and evrah refers to the anger against an entire city. Anger and wrath in proper measure are legitimate emotions. Yours (Simeon's, Levi's) was excessive. Therefore, I will apportion your anger and wrath among all the tribes for occasions when these emotions are required. But even more. "I will scatter them through Israel" refers to the leaders of the people so that they may be moved by righteous anger to do justice with those who spurn God.<sup>16</sup> Abravanel interprets the text to mean that the tribes of Levi and Simeon will be scattered among the other tribes.<sup>17</sup> Malbim understands it more figuratively: The anger of Simeon and Levi will be dispersed among the tribes. Both Abravanel<sup>18</sup> and Malbim<sup>19</sup> see Jacob's testament as an analysis of each of the tribes' attributes and defects in order to determine who is worthy of ascending to the leadership in Israel.

According to Malbim, Jacob tells Judah: Even though you are not the oldest, nevertheless, you are worthy of kingship.<sup>20</sup> Your brothers will give you the honor and respect due a ruler. There are two requirements for being a king: One must rule in justice and in strength.<sup>21</sup> Jacob could have personified Judah as a lion who preys upon man for food. Instead, Jacob personified Judah as a lion whom all would revere because of his greatness, his military ability, and his strength.<sup>22</sup> There-

fore rulers and legislators will always come from his tribe. When the people will be exiled and when there will be no Jewish king, there will be lawmakers from the tribe of Judah. This will continue until the Messianic King who will be from his tribe will come to rule the people.<sup>23</sup> According to Malbim, Jacob's view of the Messiah is identical with that of Zechariah.<sup>24</sup> The Messiah will ride on a donkey rather than on a horse, the symbol of war. Malbim and Abravanel interpret Jacob's blessing of Judah almost identically. Indeed the only difference is that Abravanel compares Judah's traits with those of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, and says that Judah does not possess these negative qualities but rather positive ones.<sup>25</sup>

Jacob turns to Zebulun and says that he will work near the sea.<sup>26</sup> He will deal in international trade, since he is not suited to agriculture. Unlike Abravanel, Malbim does not tell us that because of Zebulun's role as a successful sea merchant he will therefore be unworthy of the throne. Abravanel emphasizes this in his commentary since this is the sole basis of Jacob's rejection.<sup>27</sup>

Issachar, on the other hand, is by nature sedentary. Therefore Jacob likens him to a donkey which prefers to be down under his burdens.<sup>28</sup> Since Issachar's territory borders on Zebulun's, the latter will export Issachar's produce and the two will divide the profits. Malbim infers that Issachar will need this peace and quiet not only to work the land, but in order to study Torah.<sup>29</sup> Finally, Jacob tells Issachar that his descendents will have to pay a tax to the king. Malbim cites the rabbis



who say that Issachar received the gift of studying Torah and that the tax was the obligation to teach Torah to all Israel.<sup>30</sup>

Abravanel makes no mention of Issachar's concern for Torah. Because Issachar will be occupied with agriculture, the tribe will be exempt from military service.<sup>31</sup> Malbim makes no mention of this idea.

Dan is the next son whom Jacob addresses. Malbim explains that the tribe of Dan had to guard against mounted warriors who attack from the rear. Dan will bear the responsibility for maintaining the security of Israel.<sup>32</sup>

Jacob next speaks to Gad. Malbim says that there will be two military groups. One will fight in front of Israel's lines, and the other will locate and ambush potential invaders. The latter is Gad's function.<sup>33</sup> Abravanel stresses the fact that Gad is fit only for working the land and not for ruling. He sees Gad's inability to confront his enemies face to face as a weakness which renders the tribe unsuitable for leadership.<sup>34</sup>

Both Abravanel and Malbim portray Asher as a servant to the king. Abravanel tells us specifically that Asher is suited to be a servant to the king and not to rule himself.<sup>36</sup>

Naphtali is the next son to be addressed by Jacob. Malbim's interpretation of the passage differs from Abravanel's. Malbim says that Naphtali is like a tree which spreads out and has many beautiful branches. In other words, the tribe of Naphtali will occupy a great area of Canaan.<sup>37</sup> Abravanel explains that



Jacob foresees Naphtali as a faithful worker. He will always fulfill the orders of his master. The tribe of Naphtali is skilled in language and style which are good traits for counselors and diplomats.<sup>38</sup>

The last two sons whom Jacob addresses are Joseph and Benjamin. According to Malbim, Jacob tells Joseph that even though Naphtali is a beautiful tree, Joseph is one which bears fruit.<sup>39</sup> This has three advantages: One, it is a vine which bears fruit is better than a tree which does not. Two, it stands by the water which makes it fresh and verdant. Three, the branches of this vine grow high and are fruitful. They are so high that they reach the wall. All of this Malbim explains in the following manner: One, Joseph is tall and handsome. Two, he will possess wisdom and command respect. Three, God has raised him to greatness and honor.<sup>40</sup> Malbim explains that even though there were those who hated and slandered Joseph, (an allusion to Potiphar's servants and to his brothers), Joseph did not respond with violence but rather meddah keneged meddah. He showered them with gold and silver and gave them wealth and gifts. Because he did this, God will help Joseph forever. At a time when God will show His anger to the world, He will continue to sustain Joseph because of his righteousness.<sup>41</sup>

Abravanel tells us that since Joseph was envied and hated by his brothers, he would be unsuitable for the kingship.<sup>42</sup> A ruler is dependent on his people's love.

Jacob tells Benjamin that he is like a wolf who preys

in the evening and leaves the spoil till the morning.<sup>43</sup> This indicates that Benjamin will be a successful warrior;<sup>44</sup> it looks to the time of King Saul. Abravanel sees Benjamin as unworthy to be king because he is not a man of justice. A warrior should not utilize his power to loot and pillage.<sup>45</sup>

Malbim tells us that Jacob blessed each of his twelve sons separately. The number twelve is significant: There are twelve signs in the Zodiac, twelve gates to heaven, twelve monuments which Moses erected, and twelve stone altars built by Elijah.<sup>46</sup>

According to Malbim, before Jacob, God's presence was manifest in only one individual in each generation and he was fortunate to gain in spiritual advantages. Now, however, God's providence has spread from one person to twelve different tribes.<sup>47</sup> Malbim compares Jacob and his family to a tree. Jacob is the root, and the tribes the branches. God's presence has now spread from the root to the branches.<sup>48</sup> Malbim cites the Midrash which says that no one blessing is more important than any of the other blessings.<sup>49</sup> Each blessing is needed for the benefit of all. Malbim, who bases his explanation on the Midrash, tells us that all blessings were one and it was not necessary to divide them. But now that Jacob is about to die, these small blessings must be connected into one. Jacob tells them that they will be able to retain the essence of his holiness and goodness. However, if they do not behave properly, Jacob will depart not only phys-

ically but spiritually as well. The implication is that God's presence would leave them.<sup>50</sup>

Before Jacob dies, he instructs his sons about his burial. As Malbim explains Genesis 49:29-30, Jacob wants to be buried with his fathers so that his body will rise with them at the time of the resurrection. Until now, Jacob's soul was outside the boundaries where the righteous souls are placed after death. When Jacob says that he is about to be gathered to his kin he means that his soul will no longer be bound inside of his flesh but placed with all of the other righteous in the bound of life. Both Malbim and Abravanel say that Jacob reminded his sons of the special significance of the Cave of Machpelah. Both commentators agree that Jacob was making sure that there would be no error on the part of the sons. Therefore he refreshes their recollection of facts of the purchase of Machpelah.

When Jacob has completed his instructions, he dies.<sup>51</sup> Malbim tells us Jacob is like a man who goes from one land to another, finally selecting the place he desires. He makes arrangements for provisions along the way, maps out his direction, and instructs his sons on how to behave while he is gone. Malbim compares Jacob's death to a voyage. Jacob boards the ship which will take him to his final destination. Malbim cites the rabbis who say that Jacob did not die.<sup>52</sup> Malbim explains the word vayigva' to mean that the spirit that was in Jacob left him.<sup>53</sup> Abravanel cites a statement by Rabbi Jochanan who said that Jacob will always live on.<sup>54</sup>

Joseph kissed Jacob's body after he had expired. Malbim says that although it is customary not to touch cadavers for they are impure, Jacob's body was holy and not rendered unclean by death.<sup>55</sup> Malbim says that Jacob's greatness can be recognized in the special doctors whom he had as servants.<sup>56</sup> Why did Joseph embalm Jacob's holy body? <sup>57</sup> Malbim tells us that the purpose of burial is to allow the body to return to dust. The divine soul which is in man departs from the body immediately after death and returns to its Source. However, the spirit does not depart from the body immediately. There is a process by which the spiritual and the material body are separated. However, there are instances when the spiritual part is not separated from the physical part until the body returns to dust. Therefore, the corpse is made unholy by the connection of spiritual and material parts and remains so until burial.<sup>58</sup>

Malbim tells us that in the case of Jacob, who was holy and perfect, the spirit separated immediately from the physical body and there was no impurity to the body. Therefore, Malbim tries to teach us that the bodies of the righteous do not become impure. Therefore, the doctors embalmed the body to keep it as a pure vessel which contained within it this magnificent soul, Israel.<sup>59</sup> Of the forty days required to embalm Jacob, the brothers wept for thirty.<sup>60</sup>

Joseph gave Pharaoh four reasons why he should permit him to bury Jacob in Canaan. First, it is a mitzvah to honor parents. Second, he had taken an oath. Third, it is a

mitzvah to fulfill the wishes of a dead person. Fourth, he had made a pact with Jacob during his lifetime to remember his graveside and he is obligated to fulfill it.<sup>61</sup> Joseph insists that he is asking permission to go and return. He has not gone to Canaan so much as once since he became Prime Minister while Jacob was still alive and all that he desires now is to bury his father.<sup>62</sup> Pharaoh grants Joseph permission to go and then to return.

On verse 7 and 8 of chapter 50 Malbim observes that Pharaoh had elevated Joseph in three steps. First, he made Joseph master over all of his kingdom. Second, he made him chief over all of Egypt. Third, he made him his second-in-command. Corresponding to the first, Pharaoh allows his servants to go with Joseph. Corresponding to the second, he allows the elders of Egypt to accompany Joseph. Corresponding to the third, Pharaoh now gives him horses and horsemen so that he will be prepared for war. The only possessions which Pharaoh did not allow Joseph to take were his young children and his animals, for they remained there as a guarantee of his return.<sup>63</sup> Malbim tells us that some exegetes have suggested that Pharaoh's refusal to allow the children to go indicates that the slavery of the Hebrews can be traced to this time, though it did not go into full effect until after Joseph's death.<sup>64</sup> Abravanel says that Joseph and his brothers had to leave their wives, children, and cattle in the land of Goshen.<sup>65</sup> Malbim specifically points out that their wives accompanied them along the way. Only



their small children and beasts remained in Goshen. Malbim explains that when the Egyptians accompanied Joseph and his household to Goren ha'atad beyond the Jordan, they realized that they had lost a great deal by not having Jacob buried in their land. The Canaanites remarked that this was a period of great mourning for the Egyptians, but they themselves did not mourn. Malbim tells us that they were overjoyed for they were gaining a tzadik, a righteous man since Jacob would soon be buried in Canaan.<sup>67</sup> Abravanel writes that the Canaanites were so overwhelmed by the entourage of horses and weapons that they believed their people were burying the King of Egypt himself.<sup>68</sup> Malbim tells us that the sons alone lifted up their father and placed him into the Cave as Jacob had instructed them to do.<sup>69</sup> All of the brothers together returned to Egypt, no one remained in Canaan. According to Malbim, that the mourners left first, as was the custom, and then the rest of the entourage.<sup>70</sup>

After the brothers had returned to Egypt and resumed their daily routines, they realized that while their father lived there was unity among them, because of Jacob's concern for all of them. This unity and comradeship had continued during the time of Jacob's funeral, since all were busy mourning their father, but now they reckoned that this had subsided. Nothing remained to bind the brothers together. Joseph would be able to take revenge upon them. Joseph then alleviates their fears and reminds them that they are part of God's plan. God had set Joseph in Egypt;



they were only His tools. God's intention was for Joseph to perfect the brothers' characters. How then could Joseph have second thoughts about an act of God? <sup>71</sup>

Finally we learn that Joseph merited the blessing of seeing four generations of children. <sup>72</sup>

Abravanel sees Jacob as a Jewish philosopher and scholar. Malbim portrays Jacob as a simple, righteous human being possessing a good Jewish soul.

NOTES  
CHAPTER 1

1. Joseph Sarachek, Don Isaac Abravanel (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1938), pp. 17-33.
2. Ben Zion Netanyahu, Don Isaac Abravanel (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968), pp. 26-32.
3. Zvi Avneri, "Isaac Ben Judah Abravanel," Encyclopedia Judaica. 1971, II p. 103.
4. Netanyahu, op. cit., pp. 36-37.
5. Ibid., pp. 38-39.
6. Avneri, op. cit., p. 105.
7. J. B. Trend and H. Loewe, Isaac Abravanel (six lectures) (London: Cambridge University Press, 1937) pp. 47-48
8. Ibid., pp. 105-107.
9. Ibid., pp. 57-58, 62-66.
10. Netanyahu, op. cit., pp. 158-162, 191-192.
11. Ibid., pp. 221-224.

NOTES  
CHAPTER 2

1. Yehoshua Horowitz, "Meir Loeb Jehiel Michael Malbim" Encyclopedia Judaica. 1971, XI, 822.
2. Chaim Heschel Braverman, "Harav Malbim," Knesset Israel, (1888) 207-208.
3. Horowitz, op. cit., 822.
4. M. D. Haklai, "Harav Meir Leibush Malbim," Talpiot IV, (1949-50), 366.
5. Jacob Mark, Bemehitzatam shel Geddei Hador, (Jerusalem: Gevil Publishers, 1952), p. 131
6. Haklai, op. cit., p. 365.

7. Horowitz, op. cit., p. 822.
8. Ibid.
9. Theodore Lavi, "Rumania, "E. J., 1971, XIV, 388.
10. Haklai, op. cit., p. 132.
11. Mark op. cit., p. 132.
12. Horowitz, op. cit., p. 823.
13. Ibid.
14. Bernard M. Casper, An Introduction To Jewish Bible Commentary (New York: Thomas Yoseloff 1960), p. 109.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., p. 108.
17. See Judges 11:30-31.
18. Haklai, op. cit., p. 364.
19. Horowitz, op. cit., p. 823.
20. Braverman, op. cit., p. 211.

#### NOTES

#### CHAPTER 3

1. Isaac Abravanel, Perush al Hatorah (Jerusalem: Hotzaat Sefarim B'nai Aravel, 1964), Question 1 to Genesis 39, p. 374.
2. Ibid., Genesis 39 Question 1.
3. Ibid., Question 12 to Genesis 41, p. 384.
4. Ibid., Question 12 to Genesis 47, p. 424.
5. Ibid., Question 12 to Genesis 47, p. 425.
6. Ibid., Question 1 to Genesis 49, p. 429.
7. Ibid., Question 2 to Genesis 37, p. 359.
8. Ibid., Question 4 to Genesis 37, p. 359.
9. Ibid., Question 5 to Genesis 39, p. 374.

10. Ibid., Question 3 to Genesis 49, p. 430.
11. Ibid., Question 5 to Genesis 37, p. 359.
12. Ibid., Question 8 to Genesis 37, p. 360.
13. Ibid., Question 8 to Genesis 43, p. 407.
14. Ibid., Question 14 to Genesis 44, p. 411.
15. Ibid., Question 18 to Genesis 37, p. 361.
16. Ibid., Question 18 to Genesis 37, p. 361.
17. Ibid., Question 4 to Genesis 41, p. 397.
18. Ibid., Question 4 to Genesis 41, p. 397.
19. Ibid., Question 2 to Genesis 47, p. 424.
20. Ibid., Question 9 to Genesis 37, p. 360.
21. Ibid., Question 17 to Genesis 37, p. 361.
22. Ibid., Question 1 to Genesis 43, p. 406.
23. Ibid., Question 2 to Genesis 37, p. 359.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., Question 3 to Genesis 37, p. 359.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., Question 6 to Genesis 47, p. 424.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., Question 7 to Genesis 47, p. 424.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., Question 6 to Genesis 41, p. 398.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., Question 18 to Genesis 37, p. 361.
36. Ibid., Question 1 to Genesis 41, p. 380.

37. Ibid., Question 3 to Genesis 43, p. 406.
38. Ibid., Question 1 to Genesis 41, p. 397.
39. Ibid., Question 10 to Genesis 41, p. 384.
40. Ibid., Question 12 to Genesis 41, p. 388.
41. Ibid., Question 3 to Genesis 41, p. 397.
42. Ibid., Question 2 to Genesis 49, p. 430.

#### NOTES

#### CHAPTER 4

1. Malbim, Hatorah Vehamitzah al Chamisha Chumshei Torah  
(Tel Aviv: Hotzaat M'farshay Hatanach, (n.d.))  
Questions to Genesis 37 (1-10)
2. Ibid., Questions to Genesis 40:1-21.
3. Ibid., Questions to Genesis 41:25-35.
4. Ibid., Questions to Genesis 37:1-10.
5. Ibid., Questions to Genesis 41:39-56.
6. Ibid., Questions to Genesis 37:1-10.
7. Ibid., Questions to Genesis 40:1-21.
8. Ibid., Questions to Genesis 45:5-21.
9. Ibid., Questions to Genesis 37:21-27.
10. Ibid., Questions to Genesis 37:1-10.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., Genesis 39:8.
13. Ibid., Genesis 45:12.
14. Ibid., Genesis 42:25-27.
15. Ibid., Questions to Genesis 42:3-14.
16. Ibid., Questions to Genesis 45:5-21.
17. Ibid.

NOTESCHAPTER 5

1. Talmud Bavli, Sota 34a.
2. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 37, pp. 361-2.
3. Ibid., Genesis 37, p. 362.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. See Genesis 37:1.
7. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 37, p. 362.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., Genesis 37, p. 363.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., Genesis 37, p. 366.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., Genesis 37, p. 368.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.

NOTESCHAPTER 6

1. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 37:1.
2. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 37.
3. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 37:3.
4. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 37.
5. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 37:3.
6. Ibid., Genesis 37:8-11



NOTESCHAPTER 7

1. See Genesis 37:3.
2. See Genesis 37:4.
3. See Genesis 37:5-11.
4. See Genesis 37:8.
5. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 37, p. 363.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., Genesis 37, p. 414.
9. Ibid., Genesis 37, p. 363.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., Genesis 37, p. 365

NOTESCHAPTER 8

1. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 37:2.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., Genesis 37:5-11.
6. Ibid., Genesis 37:6.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., Genesis 37:9.

NOTESCHAPTER 9

1. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 37, p. 365.
2. Ibid., Genesis 37, p. 364.

3. Ibid., Genesis 37, p. 366.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., Genesis 37, p. 367.
8. Ibid.

#### NOTES

#### CHAPTER 10

1. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 37:2.
2. Ibid., Genesis 37:11.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., Genesis 37:12.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., Genesis 37:18.
8. Ibid., Genesis 37:20.
9. Ibid., Genesis 37:21.
10. See Genesis 37:21.
11. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 37:21.
12. Ibid., Genesis 37:23.
13. See Genesis 37:26.
14. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 37:26.

#### NOTES

#### CHAPTER 11

1. See Genesis 37:36.
2. Agravanel, op. cit., Genesis 39, p. 375.
3. Ibid., Genesis 39, p. 376.

NOTESCHAPTER 12

1. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 37:21-27.
2. Ibid., Questions to chapter 37(21-27).
3. Ibid., Genesis 37:28.
4. Ibid., Genesis 39:1.
5. Ibid., Genesis 39:2-3.
6. Ibid., Genesis 39:5-6.
7. Ibid., Genesis 39:4.
8. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 39.
9. Ibid., Genesis 39.
10. Genesis Rabbah 87:2, Soncino Midrash Genesis Rabbah, Volume II, p. 811.
11. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 39.
12. Ibid., Genesis 39:19.
13. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 39.
14. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 39:20.
15. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 39.

NOTESCHAPTER 13

1. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 40, p. 378.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 379.
4. Ibid., Genesis 41, p. 384.
5. Ibid., p. 385.
6. Ibid., p. 386.
7. Ibid., p. 389.

8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 394.
10. Ibid., p. 395.
11. Ibid., Question 12 to Genesis 41, p. 384.

#### NOTES

#### CHAPTER 14

1. Genesis Rabbah 88:2, Soncino Midrash Genesis Rabbah, Volume II, p. 814.
2. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 40:1.
3. Ibid., Genesis 40:2-4.
4. Ibid., Genesis 40:9.
5. Ibid., Genesis 40:10-13.
6. Ibid., Genesis 40:8.
7. Ibid., op. cit., 40:14.
8. Ibid., Genesis 40:23.
9. Genesis Rabbah 89:4, Soncino Midrash Genesis Rabbah, Volume II, p. 822.
10. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 41:1.
11. Genesis Rabbah 89:8, Soncino Midrash Genesis Rabbah, Volume II, p. 825.
12. Ibid., 89:5.
13. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 41:5,8.
14. Ibid., Genesis 41:10.
15. Ibid., Genesis 41:25-38.
16. Ibid., Genesis 41:33.
17. Ibid., Genesis 41:37-40.
18. Ibid., Genesis 41:41-44.

NOTES

CHAPTER 15

1. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 41, p. 399.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 399-400.
4. Ibid., p. 400.
5. Ibid., Question 4 to Genesis 41, p. 397.
6. T. B. Sanhedrin 90a.
7. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 42, p. 401.
8. Ibid., Genesis 43, p. 408.
9. Ibid., Genesis 42, p. 401.
10. See Genesis 42:9.
11. See Genesis 42:21.
12. See Genesis 42:9.
13. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 42, p. 401.
14. Ibid., Question 8 to Genesis 41, p. 398.
15. Ibid., Question 10 to Genesis 41, p. 398.
16. Ibid., Genesis 42, p. 402.
17. Ibid., Question 12 to Genesis 41, p. 398.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., Genesis 42, p. 403.
20. Ibid., p. 404.
21. Ibid., Genesis 43, p. 408.
22. Ibid., Question 5 to Genesis 43, p. 406.
23. Ibid., Genesis 43, p. 409.
24. Ibid., p. 410.
25. Ibid., Question 4 to Genesis 44, p. 410.

26. Ibid., Genesis 44, p. 412.
27. Ibid., p. 413.
28. Ibid.

#### NOTES

#### CHAPTER 16

1. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 41:53-55.
2. Ibid.
3. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 41, p. 399.
4. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 41:56-57.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., Genesis 42:1.
8. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 41, p. 399.
9. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 42:2.
10. Ibid., Genesis 42:3-4.
11. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 45, p. 415.
12. Malbim, Genesis 42:7.
13. Ibid., Genesis 42:8.
14. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 42, p. 400.
15. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 42:7.
16. Ibid., Genesis 42:7.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., Genesis 42:9.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., Genesis 42:10



22. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 42, p. 403.
23. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 42:10.
24. Ibid., Genesis 42:12.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., Genesis 42:13.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., Genesis 42:14.
30. Ibid.
31. Abravanel, op. cit., Question 12 to Genesis 41.
32. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 42:15-16.
33. Ibid., Genesis 42:21.
34. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 42, pp. 402-403.
35. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 42:18.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., Genesis 42:19-20.
38. Ibid., Genesis 42:21.
39. Ibid., Genesis 42:21.
40. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 42, p. 403.
41. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 42:21.
42. Ibid., Genesis 42:22.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., Genesis 42:22,24.
45. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 43, p. 408.
46. See Genesis 42:25.
47. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 42:25-27.
48. Ibid.

60. See Genesis 42:27.
61. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 42:28.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., Genesis 42:29.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid., Genesis 42:30.
66. Ibid., Genesis 42:36.
67. Ibid., Genesis 42:37.
68. Ibid., Genesis 42:38.
69. Ibid., Genesis 43:2.
70. Ibid., Genesis 43:8-9.
71. Ibid., Genesis 43:11.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid., Genesis 43:12.
75. Ibid., Genesis 43:14.
76. Ibid., Genesis 43:20-22.
77. See Genesis 43:24-25, Genesis 44:3.
78. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 43:23, 44:3.
79. Ibid., Genesis 44:4-5.
80. See Genesis 44:4.
81. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 44:4-5.
82. See Genesis 44:7-8.
83. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 44:10.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid., Genesis 44:15.
86. Ibid.

76. Ibid., Genesis 44:17.
77. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 43, p. 408.
78. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 44:17.
79. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 43, p. 408.
80. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 42:24.
81. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 43, p. 408.
82. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 44:18.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid., Genesis 44:19.
85. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 44, p. 412.
86. Ibid., Question 4 to Genesis 44, p. 410.
87. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 44:20.
88. Ibid., Genesis 44:32.
89. Ibid., Genesis 44:32-34.
90. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 44, p. 413.
91. See Genesis 47:13-14.
92. Ibid., Genesis 47:15.
93. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 47:23.
94. Ibid., Genesis 47:24.
95. Ibid.

#### NOTES

#### CHAPTER 17

1. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 45, p. 414.
2. Ibid., question 12 to Genesis 44, p. 411.
3. See Genesis 45:4.
4. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 45, p. 414.
5. Ibid., p. 415.

6. Ibid., pp. 414-415.
7. Ibid., question 16 to Genesis 44, p. 412.
8. Ibid., Genesis 45, p. 418.
9. Ibid.

#### NOTES

#### CHAPTER 18

1. Malbim, op. cit., Questions to Genesis 45.
2. Ibid., Genesis 45:1-2.
3. Ibid., Genesis 45:4.
4. Ibid., Genesis 45:5.
5. Ibid., Genesis 45:6-7.
6. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 45.
7. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 45:9-12.
8. Ibid., Genesis 45:13.
9. Ibid., Genesis 45:16-20.
10. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 45.
11. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 45:21.
12. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 45 (beginning with verse 9)

#### NOTES

#### CHAPTER 19

1. Abravanel, op. cit., question 17 to Genesis 44, p. 412.
2. Ibid., p. 419.
3. See Genesis 46:28.
4. Abravanel, op. cit., p. 421.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 422.
7. Ibid., question 4 to Genesis 46, p. 421.

8. Ibid., p. 422.
9. Ibid.
10. See Genesis 47:8.
11. Abravanel, op. cit., p. 423.

#### NOTES

#### CHAPTER 20

1. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 45:25.
2. Ibid., Genesis 46:1.
3. Ibid., Genesis 46:1-4
4. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 45, p. 419.
5. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 46:5-7.
6. Ibid., Genesis 46:6-7.
7. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 46, p. 421.
8. Ibid., Genesis 46, p. 422.
9. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 46:31.
10. Ibid., Genesis 46:33-34.
11. Ibid., Genesis 47:3-4.
12. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 46, p. 422, col. 2.
13. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 47:5-6.
14. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 47, p. 422.
15. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 47:9.
16. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 46, p. 422-3.

#### NOTES

#### CHAPTER 21

1. Abravanel, op. cit., Question 1 to Genesis 47, p. 424.
2. Genesis Rabbah 96, Soncino Midrash Genesis Rabbah, Volume II, pp. 889-890.

3. See Genesis 47:29.
4. Abravanel, op. cit., Question 2 to Genesis 47, p. 424.
5. Genesis Rabbah 96:5 Soncino Midrash Genesis Rabbah, Volume II, pp. 889-890.
6. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 47, p. 426.
7. Ibid., Genesis 48.
8. Ibid., Question 7 to Genesis 47, p. 424.
9. Ibid., Genesis 47, p. 427.
10. See Genesis 48:8-11.
11. Abravanel, op. cit., Question 12 to Genesis 47, p. 425.
12. Ibid., Genesis 48, p. 428.
13. Ibid., Genesis 48, p. 429.
14. Ibid.

#### NOTES

#### CHAPTER 22

1. Abravanel, op. cit., Question 1 to Genesis 47.
2. Ibid., Genesis 47, p. 425.
3. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 47:28.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., Genesis 47:29.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., Genesis 47:30.
8. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 48:8-9.
9. Ibid., Genesis 48:14-19.
10. Ibid., Genesis 48:16.
11. Ibid., Genesis 48:16-20.
12. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 48, pp. 428-429.



NOTESCHAPTER 23

1. Talmud Bavli Sota 34a.
2. See Chronicles I 5:1.
3. See Genesis 49:7.
4. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 49, pp.432-33.
5. See Isaiah 32:1.
6. See Genesis 49:8-12.
7. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 49, p. 435.
8. Ibid., Genesis 49, p. 436.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., Genesis 49, pp. 436-7.
12. Ibid., Genesis 49, p. 437.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., Genesis 49, pp. 437-8.
15. Ibid., Genesis 49, p. 438.
16. Ibid., Genesis 49, p. 438.
17. Ibid., Genesis 49, p. 439.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., Genesis 49, p. 446.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., Genesis 49, p. 441.
22. Ibid., Genesis 49, p. 442.

NOTESCHAPTER 24

1. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 49:1-2.

2. Genesis Rabbah 98:2 Soncino Midrash Genesis Rabbah,  
Volume II, p. 946.
3. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis, p. 431.
4. Ibid.
5. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 49:3.
6. Ibid., Genesis 49:3.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., referring to Genesis Rabbah 97 (New Version).
9. Ibid., Genesis 49:4.
10. Ibid., Genesis 49:5.
11. Ibid., Genesis 49:5
12. Ibid., Genesis 49:6.
13. Ibid., Genesis 49:7.
14. Ibid., Genesis 49:7.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 49, p. 432.
18. Ibid., Genesis 49, p. 431.
19. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 49:5.
20. Ibid., Genesis 49:8.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., Genesis 49:9.
23. Ibid., Genesis 49:10.
24. Ibid., Genesis 49:11.
25. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 49, p. 433.
26. See Genesis 49:13.
27. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 49, p. 436.

28. See Genesis 49:15.
29. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 49:14.
30. Ibid., Genesis 49:15.
31. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 49, p. 436.
32. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 49:16.
33. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 49:19.
34. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 49, pp. 436-7.
35. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 49:20.
36. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 49, p. 437.
37. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 49:21.
38. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 49, p. 437.
39. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 49:22.
40. Ibid., Genesis 49:22.
41. Ibid., Genesis 49:26.
42. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 49, p. 438.
43. See Genesis 49:27.
44. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 49:27.
45. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 49, p. 438.
46. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 49:28.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Genesis Rabbah 97, Soncino Midrash Genesis Rabbah,  
Volume II, p. 912.
50. Ibid., chapter 100:1, p. 987.
51. See Genesis 49:33.
52. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 49:33.
53. Ibid.

54. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 49, p. 439.
55. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 50:1.
56. Ibid., Genesis 50:2.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., Genesis 50:3.
61. Ibid., Genesis 50:5-6.
62. Ibid., Genesis 50:5.
63. Ibid., Genesis 50:7-8.
64. Ibid.
65. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 49, p. 440.
66. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 50:10-11.
67. Ibid.
68. Abravanel, op. cit., Genesis 49, p. 440.
69. Malbim, op. cit., Genesis 50:12.
70. Ibid., Genesis 50:14.
71. Ibid., Genesis 50:15.
72. Ibid., Genesis 50:23

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abravanel, Isaac. Perush al Hatorah, Jerusalem: Hotzaat Sefarim B'nai Arvel, 1964.
- Averi, Zvi. "Isaac Ben Judah Abravanel," Encyclopedia Judaica, 1971, vol II.
- Baron, Salo W. A Social and Religious History of the Jews, vols. IX, XI. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1965, 1967.
- Braverman, Chaim Heschel. "Teledet Harav Malbim." Knesset Israel. 1888, pp. 207-212.
- Casper, Bernard M. An Introduction to Jewish Bible Commentary. New York & London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1960.
- Ginzberg, L. Jewish Encyclopedia, New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1901.
- Haklai, M. D. "Harav Meir Leibush Malbim," Talpiot. IV, 1941/50, pp. 364-370.
- Horowitz, Yehoshua. "Meir Loeb Jehiel Michael Malbim," Encyclopedia Judaica, Jerusalem: Keter Publishers, 1971, vol. XI.
- Malbim (Meir Leibush). Sefer Hatorah V'hamitzvah al Chamish Chumshai Torah. Tel-Aviv: Hotzaat Mefarshei Hatanach, N.D.
- Margolis-Marx. History of the Jewish People. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1927.
- Minkin, Jacob S. Abarbanel and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain. New York: Behrman's Jewish Book House, 1938.
- Netanyahu, Ben Zion. Don Isaac Abravanel—Statesman and Philosopher. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968.
- Plaut, G. The Torah—Genesis. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1974.
- Rosenbaum and Silverman. Pentateuch With Rashi's Commentary. Translated into English, New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1935.
- Roth, C. A Short History of the Jewish People. Oxford: East and West Library, 1943.

Sarachek, Joseph. Don Isaac Abravanel. New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1938.

Shisha, A. Segal. "Toledot Malbim." Talpiot, VI, 1953, pp. 498-505.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Holy Scriptures. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America.

Trend, J. B. and Loewe, A. Isaac Abravanel-Six Lectures. London: Cambridge University Press, 1937.

Waxman, Meyer. History of Jewish Literature. New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1935.