

**Joseph, Judah and the Family of Jacob:
Reconciliation of a House Divided**

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Introduction

Sir Francis Bacon, commenting on what we can learn from our predecessors, once stated, "Age can never be defied." Although unlikely, Bacon might as well have been speaking about the relationship that the Jews have had with their ancestral history.

The world of Midrash provides a fascinating glimpse into the teachings of our rabbinic ancestors. For the Jewish people, Midrash represents the thinking and interpretations of Rabbis who have spent their entire lives trying to make Judaism applicable to their surrounding environments. By constantly grappling with the many open-ended questions that the Biblical narratives raise, the midrashim point the way for us to learn and grow personally and spiritually.

Midrash is more than just story telling. Anyone who views a piece of midrashic exegesis as simply a "filler" for the Biblical narrative is missing the point. Throughout history, mankind has constantly sought to improve the condition of human affairs. Whether we are evaluating our individual relationships with each other, our personal connection with God, or how we relate to the myriad of ethical and moral conundrums that impact us almost on a daily basis, the midrashic teachings serve as directional guideposts. Uncovering the secrets of great theological and philosophical arguments that are poetically written, yet still able to be understood and appreciated by ordinary Jews, is the greatest pleasure of learning a piece of Midrash.

The story of Joseph and his brothers encapsulates why Midrash is so enjoyable and valuable. It is a human story, one to which many of us can relate. I chose to study the relationship between Joseph and Judah, in particular, because of the final moment at the end of the story when Judah gives his impassioned speech to Joseph, and then Joseph reveals his identity. Knowing, of course, how the story ends, I wondered what had to

have happened between the time when the brothers sold Joseph to the spicetraders who carried him down to Egypt, and years later when Joseph brings his family to be with him in Egypt. Between those two moments, the Bible contains numerous episodes that, at first blush, may seem disconnected. How did the story of Judah and Tamar fit within the process of reconciliation? What did the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife add? What can we learn from Joseph's time in prison and later as the Vizier of Egypt? I had hoped to find some clues from the Rabbis as to what these stories meant in the overall scheme of the reconciliation process.

In the Book of Chronicles, the author attributes more space to the tribe of Judah than to any other Israelite tribe. Although Reuben was the firstborn of Jacob, Joseph was given the birthright, and Benjamin was his father's favorite. Yet, the Chronicler tells us that "Judah became great among his brothers and a leader came from him" (I Chron. 5:2). The Chronicler clearly advances the argument that Judah, and not any of his brothers, became the most prominent son of the patriarchs of Israel.¹ Why does the Chronicler devote so much of his writing to the tribe of Judah, and how did Judah attain such a place of prominence in the Chronicler's eye? Judah emerges as the exemplar for all of Israel, and it will be the challenge of the Rabbis to understand how Judah was able to achieve such status

I began my research, therefore, by concentrating on Judah. I expected that what I would learn would apply to Judah's character alone. What I found was something much different. As this thesis highlights, Judah was only one figure, albeit a powerfully compelling one, in the process of the family reconciliation that eventually takes place.

¹Gary S. Knoppers. "Great Among His Brothers," but Who is He? Heterogeneity in the Composition of Judah," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 3 (2000-2001), 1-9.

Judah's character is very much intertwined with his brother Joseph, so that it is difficult to study Judah without also paying a great deal of attention to Joseph. After Joseph is sold into slavery, both Judah and Joseph go their separate ways for many chapters. However, an extraordinary, spiritual connection underlies the narrative episodes that lead up to Judah's speech in Genesis 44. Judah, and his brothers, seem destined to meet Joseph again and become reunited as a family. The Rabbis of the midrashim explore this connection, and give us clues as to how we can learn to love again those who have been estranged from us for so many years.

Before beginning my research, I spent some time reviewing the Biblical text. I knew that understanding the details of the lives of Joseph and Judah would be vitally important in unpacking the rabbinic materials. My thesis advisor, Rabbi Norman Cohen, methodically instructed me on what clues to look for within the text. I paid a great deal of attention to key issues that I anticipated the Rabbis would analyze, such as word choices, gaps in the narrative text, and major thematic shifts.

I then moved from biblical analysis to modern scholarship on the biblical text. To get a feel for where the Rabbis of the midrashim would lead me, it was first necessary to understand how modern literary figures integrated the biblical materials into a contemporary understanding.

It was only after this preliminary research that I then began to turn my attention to the rabbinic interpretations. I began by compiling midrashic citations on select biblical verses from the Joseph cycle of narratives, using verse index guides, such as *Torah ha-Ketuvah u'Mesorah al Torah, Nevi'im u'Ketuvim* as a key research tool.² I looked up the

² Hyman, Aaron, *Torah ha-Ketuvah u'Mesorah al Torah, Nevi'im u'Ketuvim*. 3 vols. (Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing, 1979).

text, and copied any which I thought might be relevant to my analysis of the material. I was particularly cognizant of any major thematic shifts that occurred as I moved chronologically through the midrashim.

From there, I organized the material by focusing upon the central ideas of the midrashim, and then organizing them according to their major themes and subthemes. I next created a comprehensive outline based upon a sequencing of all the major themes.

I then began writing, reviewing and translating each midrash to see how it fit in with the overall theme. Each section seemed like an important clue in a scavenger hunt. I could not progress to the next major theme without first fully understanding what the Rabbis had said about the previous theme.

When I was finished, the materials had been organized into seven chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the biblical material, and highlights the questions and issues that the biblical reader would normally ask. By doing this, I could better understand how the Rabbis would address specific questions that the Bible left unanswered.

The second and third chapters evaluate the characters of Joseph and Judah in their early years, according to the rabbinic material. What mistakes had they each made that lead to the split up of the family? What personality flaws did they display that they needed to overcome before a reconciliation could occur?

Chapters four and five answered these questions. Chapter four looks at the maturation process of Joseph. Joseph undergoes a series of tests while in Egypt at the hands of his master's wife, and as a result he is imprisoned. The Rabbis use these episodes as examples of how Joseph developed into an effective and compassionate

leader. Chapter five examines how Judah was able to mature in his own right. In particular, Judah's experience with Tamar provides tremendous insight into Judah's character transformation.

Chapter six analyzes the moment when Judah finally confronts Joseph. After gaining much life experience, Judah and Joseph are both prepared to bring the family back together again. The Rabbis pay particular attention to the choice words that Judah uses, teaching us how we might approach overcoming family discord in our own lives.

Lastly, chapter seven analyzes God's presence in the lives of Judah, Joseph, and the brothers. The Rabbis believe that underlying each step in the path to reconciliation is God's guiding hand. By reading Torah and doing mitzvot, the Rabbis teach us that we are each capable of spiritually growing in the way that the members of Jacob's family did.

This thesis can only serve as a guide to what the Rabbis have said about the characters of Judah and Joseph, and how they were able to reunite the house of Jacob. A comprehensive reading of the biblical text and the pertinent midrashim will give the reader a fuller understanding and appreciation for the messages that the Rabbis have tried to deliver.

My hope is that the study of this material will be meaningful to the reader, and prompt him or her to further study the midrashim. Through God's Torah, the Rabbis have pointed the way to reconciling family strife. For anyone who may be experiencing family discord in his or her own life, hopefully this thesis will be meaningful in a way that will help alleviate such dissension.

Chapter 1

The Journey of the Family: The Biblical Narrative

A. The Road to Reconciliation

Judah makes his impassioned plea before his brother Joseph in Genesis 44:18-34.

This long narrative in Genesis is filled with remorse, regret, and passion. Yet, at the same time, Judah is willing to stand up to his brother and maintain his own, personal convictions, even if it means personally sacrificing his well-being.

We see through a close reading of the Joseph story that familial reconciliation does not come at an easy price. Although Judah's speech can be a guide to how one should act in trying to make amends, the chapters leading up to Judah's speech are also instructive. After Joseph is sold into slavery, Judah immediately begins a journey in which he seeks forgiveness while at the same time experiencing guilt and remorse.

Jacob's family is fraught with strife. When Joseph was only seventeen years old, he brought back "bad reports" of his brothers while helping them tend to their flocks (Gen. 37:2). The Bible is unclear as to what these bad reports are, so the Rabbis will address this gap in the narrative. Moreover, Joseph engendered jealousy by being the favorite of his father's sons, and by receiving a special "ornamented tunic" from his father. Joseph also fails to use any discretion when interpreting his dreams to his family (Gen. 37: 5-11). In fact, the brothers "hated him so much they could not speak a friendly word to him" (Gen. 37:3-4). Eventually, the brothers' jealousy of Joseph will prompt them to take drastic actions.

The fateful day came when Jacob sent Joseph to see how his brothers were faring while they were shepherding the family flocks in Shechem. Enraged with jealousy and hatred, the brothers threw Joseph into a pit, and then cruelly sat down to enjoy a meal while Joseph languished below (Gen. 37:25). In what the Rabbis will debate as either a

half-hearted attempt or deep empathy for Joseph, Judah tried to save Joseph from certain death by declaring, "What do we profit by killing our brother and covering up his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, but let us not do away with him ourselves" (Gen. 37:26-27).

What was Judah's primary motive in saying this? Did he act out of compassion for Joseph, sincerely attempting to save his life? Or was Judah purely motivated by monetary profit and greed? The brothers return to Jacob, and watch as he grieves over Joseph, whom he mistakenly believes has been devoured by a beast (Gen. 37:3).

Eventually Joseph is sold into Egyptian slavery and becomes Potiphar's attendant. The Bible challenges us to evaluate Joseph's character when Potiphar's wife makes continuous overt sexual advances towards Joseph. Rather than betray God and his master, Joseph refuses to lie with Potiphar's wife, and as a result he is thrown into prison (Gen. 39:1-23). Joseph develops a reputation as being a dream interpreter and is brought before Pharaoh to interpret Pharaoh's dreams (Gen. 41:1-14).

After Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream, Pharaoh is so impressed he makes Joseph the Vizier over all Egypt and exclaims, "Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?" (Gen. 41:38-46) Here, the narrative challenges us to pause and evaluate Joseph's character. He seems to be a different person than the immature youth who was boasting in front of his brothers. How and why Joseph changed will be a central theme of the midrashim.

Years later, when a famine sweeps the land, Jacob sends all of the brothers except Benjamin down to Egypt to procure food. When the brothers approach Joseph, the Bible tells us that "Joseph recognized them; but he acted like a stranger toward them and spoke

harshly to them" (Gen. 42:7). Joseph accuses the brothers of being spies, and holds Simeon as ransom until they return from their father's house with Benjamin (Gen. 41:24). Joseph further tests his brothers by secretly returning the money the brothers paid for food in each of their sacks (Gen. 41:27).

Jacob, distressed at what has already become of Joseph and Simeon, refuses to let his youngest son Benjamin be taken down to Egypt. Eventually Judah impassionately challenges this decision, and says to his father, "Send the boy in my care, and let us be on our way, that we may live and not die!" (Gen. 41:8) At this point, we notice that a change has occurred in the character of Judah. Suddenly Judah appears to be a much different person than he was when he and his brothers sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites. The Rabbis will question this change, and ask themselves what happened to Judah that enabled him to become a man of reason, wisdom, and caring. Judah offers to stand as surety for Benjamin, and tell his father that Jacob can hold him responsible if Benjamin is not brought back safely (Gen. 41:9). Jacob relents and the brothers make a second descent into Egypt.

When they arrive, Joseph decides to test the brothers further. He has a servant plant a silver goblet in Benjamin's food bag before sending the brothers on their way (Gen. 44:1-2). When the brothers return to Joseph accused of being thieves, Judah and his brothers throw themselves before Joseph. Joseph refuses Judah's request to enslave all of the brothers, if only Joseph will not separate them from Benjamin (Gen. 44:14-17).

When the brothers realize their fate, Judah courageously stands up to Joseph. In his speech, he pleads with Joseph not to take Benjamin away, offering himself as a slave in place of Jacob's youngest son (Gen. 44:18-34). The words of Judah's speech raise

many questions. The Bible uses the word *vayiggash* (to “draw near”) to relate how Judah began his plea to Joseph. The Rabbis will question the meaning of this word. What does it mean for Judah to “draw near” to his estranged brother, whom he does not even recognize? Are we to understand that Judah physically “drew near,” spiritually “drew near,” or both? Furthermore, Judah’s speech invites us to analyze its core components. What can the eighteen verses of Genesis 44:18-34 tell us about the reconciliation process in any family unit? What was there in Judah’s words that made Joseph forgive his brothers and reveal his identity to them?

After Judah speaks, Joseph cannot bear the agony any longer and he immediately reveals his identity to them (Gen. 45:1-3). Joseph sends for his father and the rest of his family, and Jacob and his sons settle in Egypt (Gen. 45:9-25).

B. God’s Role in the Family Journey

Perhaps the most striking detail of the Joseph narrative is the lack of direct involvement on God’s part. No other section of Genesis has God playing such an indirect role in the affairs of the patriarchs. Nevertheless, it is clear that God is behind the relationships and the family dynamics.¹

We are told that God is with Joseph, as seen by the mysterious “man” that Joseph meets on his way to finding his brothers (Gen. 37:14-17). God is also with Joseph when he is thrown into the dungeon by Potiphar (Gen. 39:21, 23), and when Joseph interprets Pharaoh’s dream (Gen. 41:16). Finally, when Joseph succumbs to Judah’s plea, Joseph

¹ Nahum Sarna. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989): 254.

attributes the reconciliation to God (Gen. 45:6-8). The message is clear: God's presence must be palpably felt before family discord can be alleviated.

This message will not be lost on the Rabbis. Throughout the midrashic texts, God is viewed as the source of the journey towards reconciliation. The Rabbis attribute God's presence with Judah when he develops the courage to challenge Joseph. When Joseph displays resolve and loyalty by denying the advances of Potiphar's wife, the Rabbis bring God into the equation.

Likewise, the Rabbis are quick to point out that God's presence is missing when family strife is created. The Bible states, "Then Judah said to his brothers, 'What do we gain by killing our brother and covering up his blood?'" (Gen. 37:26) According to the Midrash, Judah blasphemed God's name when he admonished his brothers to sell Joseph instead of letting him die in the pit. The Rabbis declare that instead of saying *betzah* (profit) at the moment when Joseph is at the bottom of the pit, Judah says *botzeah* (unlawful benefit). Judah thus commits blasphemy against God by asking, "What unlawful benefit do we get by killing our brother? Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites!"²

For the Rabbis, then, God is the force that allows the Jewish people to continue their "journey" throughout time. By interjecting God's presence in places when the Bible fails to expressly mention God, the Rabbis are challenging us: How can we, too, bring God into our own lives as we live with our families, our neighbors, and our fellow Jews? How can we strive for wholeness in our own lives?

² Talmud Yerushalmi, *Sanhedrin* 1:1. 7 vols. (New York: M.P. Press, 1976).

C. Joseph's Transformation

Although eventually the Rabbis will look to Joseph as the messianic hope for all of Israel, the Biblical text indicates that he is not beyond reproach. Throughout the narrative, the Bible challenges us to evaluate the transformation that Joseph undergoes as he is sold into slavery and descends into Egypt.

The Bible fails to directly tell us the details of Joseph's character transformation while he is in Egypt and separated from his family. We know that he becomes the Vizier of Egypt and that he becomes acculturated. But we do not know anything of his psychological maturation process vis-à-vis his brothers. Is he resentful? Does he recognize the way in which he fostered jealousy among his brothers? Does he think of his father much, and in particular how much his father is grieving, believing Joseph to be dead? The Rabbis will address these issues and add depth to Joseph's character.

Joseph stirs up hatred and jealousy through his own misgivings. He negligently interprets his dreams in front of his family, so that his own father responds by exclaiming, "Are we to come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow low to you to the ground?" (Gen. 37:10) The Bible even tells us that Joseph gives bad reports of his brothers to Jacob, prompting the Rabbis to question Joseph's lack of foresight and wisdom (Gen. 37:2). When the brothers first arrive in Egypt, we are informed that Joseph recognized them, but that in return the brothers did not recognize Joseph (Gen. 42:7). Sforino comments that Joseph's recognition was only a collective one, and that Joseph was not capable of seeing the uniqueness of each brother.³

Yet, after he reaches the depths of despair in the pit and is then sold into Egyptian slavery, it is interesting to watch Joseph mature. The text begs us to look for a deeper

³ Sforino to Gen. 42:7.

meaning in the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Instead of seeing the episode as just a way of explaining how Joseph landed in jail, the Rabbis will use the episode to attest to Joseph's moral fiber. By refusing the advances of his master's wife, Joseph knows that he will be jailed for the next two years (Gen.39:7-20).⁴

Despite everything that has happened to him, Joseph is capable of showing love and compassion at a time when his brothers were unable to mirror similar emotions. Genesis 43:30 states that after seeing his younger brother Benjamin in Egypt, "Joseph hurried out, for he was overcome with feeling toward his brother and was on the verge of tears; he went into a room and wept there." The Biblical text does not expressly tell us how Joseph was capable of making this transformation, so the Rabbis will fill in this gap.

There was something to Joseph's character that had to grow and mature. Joseph's maturation process was a key element to the future reconciliation with his brothers. Had Joseph himself not accepted some of the responsibility for the discord with his brothers, it is doubtful that he would have been so moved by Judah's speech. Joseph had to grow up and be ready to love his brothers with all of their faults and shortcomings. Once he accomplished this, after making a twenty-two year spiritual and physical journey to another land, he was ready to accept his place again within his own family.

D. Judah's Transformation

After looking closely at Judah's actions both during and after Joseph is sold into slavery, we come to realize that Judah also had to undergo a spiritual transformation. For example, the story of Judah and Tamar illustrates how Judah had to learn the role of

⁴ Joseph's loyalty "is put to the ultimate test; a test that previously his brothers had failed." Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 272.

being a leader (Gen. 38). Judah immediately recognizes how he has committed a sin when faced with the truth of Tamar's identity, and declares, "She is more righteous than me" (Gen. 38:26).

Furthermore, it is Judah who is the realist among his brothers. When seeing Joseph again in Egypt as the Vizier, it is Judah who directly confesses his guilt at having treated his younger brother so malevolently. Throughout Genesis 42, the pronoun "they" is used to describe the brothers' dialogue with Joseph. There is a collective guilt, yet we get no indication that any of the brothers is ready to take direct responsibility. Finally, it is Judah who speaks up in Gen. 44:20 and has the courage to speak truthfully to Joseph by declaring, "His full brother is dead." Regret and honesty go hand in hand. Before Judah can approach Joseph with his plea for forgiveness, he must feel remorse and take responsibility for the past.

The Bible raises a number of interesting issues as the character of Judah is transformed. Judah seems to have very little concern for his family at the beginning of the story. He neglects Tamar, falls short in saving Joseph, and shows no remorse when reporting the events of Joseph to his father, Jacob. The Bible invites the reader to ask: What is necessary for Judah to properly repent? What course of action did Judah have to take to facilitate the eventual reconciliation? What does the theme of "descent" tell us about Judah's metamorphosis, and how do the Rabbis teach us about our own, personal descents in our lives today? Judah was responsible for Joseph's descent in the pit, he descended (*va-yered*) from his brothers to live away from them, and he descended into Egypt to procure food for his family.

The theme of "descending" is pervasive throughout the Joseph narrative. The Hebrew root for "going down" is *yod-resh-dalet*. The Rabbis use the verb to connote a spiritual descent. They imply that each character in the narrative, including Joseph himself, must undergo a psychological journey into one's self. Joseph is dropped down to the bottom of the pit. He eventually is brought to Egypt and sold into slavery, only to later be thrown down into a dungeon. The brothers, too, must go down to Egypt to procure food. At the same time, Jacob admonishes his brothers to return with Benjamin safely, or else Jacob will be sent down to Sheol in grief. One's physical descent, therefore, is a metaphor for a character's spiritual descent.

The Rabbis look to various clues within the Biblical text to answer the many questions that the Biblical text raises. The climax occurs when we are told in Genesis 44:18 that Judah "came near" (*vayiggash*) to Joseph. The Rabbis stress the importance of the word *vayiggash*. What exactly does it mean to "draw near" to another person, especially a brother who Judah and his brothers have been estranged from for so many years? The midrashim extrapolate that Judah had to summon up a great deal of courage, wisdom, and even furious anger to properly effectuate a reconciliation with Joseph and bring the family back together again.

A close reading of Judah's speech shows that it is the culmination of Judah's character growth that allows him to speak to the Vizier of Egypt with such boldness. Judah's speech to Joseph can be divided into three primary segments: regret for past events (Gen. 44:18-29), empathy towards his father (Gen. 44:30-32), and a willingness to take personal responsibility for his actions (Gen. 44:33-34). The Bible demands that we review Judah's actions following the sale of Joseph into slavery to see how he changed.

The Rabbis do this by reading between the lines of Judah's speech. Although the Bible neglects to answer the question of how the brothers could fail to confront Joseph with all of his obvious ruses, the midrashim read this into Judah's plea.

Judah is articulate and purposeful in his speech of reconciliation. One senses that Judah knew he would be making this plea from the time when Joseph was first thrown into the pit, so he has had many years to think over his words carefully. Yet, while Judah is remorseful and penitent before Joseph, he is also extremely forceful. Judah is not about to let Joseph have his way and let Benjamin be taken from his family. Judah's words are so powerful, and his presence before Joseph is so compelling, that Joseph finds it impossible to dismiss Judah's passionate address.

The story of Joseph and Judah includes elements of repentance, contriteness and acceptance. However, before Judah is even able to utter his courageous words before Joseph, a different kind of journey must be undertaken. All of the characters in the narrative, including Joseph, Judah, the other brothers, and even Jacob, must embark upon a spiritual journey of regret.⁵ Only then is Judah empowered enough to approach Joseph and demand forgiveness.

⁵ Joseph's transformation mirrors that of Judah's transformation. Both go through a sort of identity crisis. For Joseph:

[I]t is a deep love and concern for his father that in the end triumphs over any personal concerns. To express it, Joseph must disclose who he is, but he is prepared to face whatever repercussions this brings, if only he can know his father's fate. The attraction of this reading is that it reveals a transformation in Joseph that parallels the one experienced by his brothers, by Judah in particular.

Mark A. O'Brien. "The Contribution of Judah's Speech, Genesis 44:18-34, to the Characterization of Joseph." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59, 3:429-47 (1997): 445-46.

Chapter 2

Joseph and Judah in the Early Years

A. Joseph: A Prince or a Gossiper?

The Rabbis take divergent views towards Joseph in the early years of his life.

Joseph is in line to accept the mantle of his ancestors. However, his actions in his youth engender jealousy and rage towards him. We see a clear shift in how Joseph is portrayed in Jewish tradition. In the early midrashim, Joseph is beyond reproach. Later, however, Joseph becomes a paradigm for all of Israel: just as Israel has made mistakes in its relationship with God, so, too, has Joseph.

1. Joseph is Blameless

Among the earliest known Jewish writings, Joseph is portrayed as a man of great wisdom and truth. He has good intentions in his dealings with his brothers, and is an innocent victim of his intelligence and superior intellect. Because many Jews at the time of these writings were interested in assimilating into the surrounding culture, it was important for them to show that Joseph was a universal figure who could appeal to everyone, Jews and non-Jews alike.

Greek culture was pervasive throughout Judea and the civilized world in the first and second centuries CE. Greek philosophy, education and culture were regarded as the ultimate source of goodness and contentment. Greek ideology permeated the Diaspora. Many Jews were attracted to this new Greek way of looking at and understanding the world:

[T]he advance of Hellenism continued unchecked among the Jews, especially in the communities lying outside Judea, in the Greek Diaspora....The biblical writings were translated into Greek, and Greek-speaking Jews attempted to

express an outlook on life that increasingly had its footing in both the Greek and Jewish camps.⁶

It was only natural, then, for Jewish writers to expound the traditional Jewish teachings in terms that were intelligible and attractive to both Jews and Gentiles.⁷

In one of the earliest known writings, the Apocrypha, the author reminds his Jewish audience to continuously strive to live a life of virtue and reason. Compiled in Judea in the second century BCE, one book known as *The Twelve Patriarchs* reflects this mindset. In *The Twelve Patriarchs*, Joseph is portrayed as a man of reason and wisdom. When he is sold to the Ishmaelites, he declares, "When I was being sold, I refrained from telling my race to the Ishmaelites, that I am the son of Jacob, a great man and a mighty one."⁸ This is characteristic of Joseph's attitude in the story about his being sold: he had the sensible disposition to keep the peace for the sake of his brothers.⁹ The author of *The Twelve Patriarchs* portrays Joseph as a model of Greek citizenship. Likewise, in the Book of Jubilees, which is also a part of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, Joseph is described as a wise and discreet leader.¹⁰

Two centuries later, the Jewish historian Josephus would also hold Joseph up as a paradigm of virtue. Writing in the first century CE, Josephus affirms for his fellow Jews the positive attributes of Roman culture and education. He wrote *The Antiquities of the Jews* to show the Gentile world the virtues of the Jews.¹¹ Josephus stated that Joseph

⁶Nicholas De Lange. *Apocrypha: Jewish Literature of the Hellenistic Age* (New York: The Viking Press, 1978): 15.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "Testament of Joseph" 10:6, quoted in Harm W. Hollander. *Joseph as an Ethical Model in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Leiden, England: E.J. Brill, 1981): 44.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *The Book of Jubilees*. R.H. Charles, trans. (London: Adam and Charles Black Publishing, 1902): 40:5.

¹¹ *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*. William Whiston, trans. (New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988): ix.

always acted with "good conscience" and "within the rules of reason," so that he could look forward to a "good life."¹² Like the author of *The Twelve Patriarchs*, Joseph was always a model of prudence and wisdom in Josephus' writings.

Writing at about the same time as Josephus, but in Alexandria, Philo also weaved together Greek and Jewish thought. By using the Biblical narratives as allegorical motifs celebrating universal notions of fairness and discretion, Philo accurately reflected the non-particularistic attitude of his era.¹³ For Philo, Joseph represented what all of us must embark upon at some time during our lives, that is, a spiritual journey of the soul.

Like Josephus, Philo describes Joseph's act of not revealing himself to his captors as a way of showing his inner strength, prudence, and self-restraint. Furthermore, when Joseph is confronted with the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife, it is the universal traits of "nature and habit" that gives him the fortitude to resist.¹⁴ According to Philo, Joseph never purposely engendered jealousy among his brothers, but instead was a gracious and forgiving king who even saluted his brothers after they took him out of the pit.¹⁵ Even Joseph's father, Jacob, is seen as a model of virtue, one who is able to live peacefully among the other nations of the world.¹⁶

In the early writings, then, Joseph becomes a prototype for virtue, reason, and wisdom. Many later midrashim, in contrast, will be critical of Joseph's early years in

¹² Ibid., 56.

¹³ Ellen Birnbaum. *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought: Israel, Jews and Proselytes* (Boston: Brown University, 1996): 1-2. This attitude will contrast dramatically with the Rabbinical writings of the later midrashim. Philo portrays Joseph as universal character who can appeal to Gentiles, whereas the Rabbis will see Joseph as a particular Jewish character who represents the redemption of the Diaspora Jews.

¹⁴ *The Works of Philo Judaeus*. C.D. Yonge, trans. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854): 462-63.

¹⁵ Ibid., 453-56.

¹⁶ Ibid., 500.

Canaan and Egypt. However, after undergoing a spiritual transformation, Joseph nearly always winds up as a universalistic figure of temperance and reason.¹⁷

The influence of Philo, Josephus and other early texts on how the Rabbis will later portray Joseph should not be underestimated. Although the same traits are applied to Joseph as a young man in Canaan and in Egypt, the Rabbis will no longer view those traits as being universalistic.

Instead, Joseph becomes a particular kind of leader. He is Jewish, above all else, and will some day lead the nation of Israel back to an exalted status among the rest of the nations. His displays of virtue and wisdom do not come solely from himself as a human being, but from God. For example, when responding to Potiphar's wife, Joseph protests by mentioning *adoni* – my master. The Rabbis explain that Joseph had more than just his master Potiphar on his mind. He was thinking of God, the ultimate Master, and even his father Jacob, when denying her advances.¹⁸

In contrast to Philo and Josephus, the Rabbis do not hesitate to elevate Joseph above the leaders of the ruling nations. By showing temperance and discretion, Joseph is described as a king.¹⁹ Because of Joseph's diligence, the Midrash elevates Joseph to a status that is above any other leader ruling the earth:

The Song of Songs: This is in line with that which Scripture said through Solomon: "Do you see a man who is diligent in his business? He will stand before kings, he will not stand before mean men"(Prov. 22:29). This refers to Joseph: "But one day, when he went into the house to do his work..."(Gen. 39:10).²⁰

¹⁷ In Midrash Esther Rabbah 7:7, Mordecai is likened to Joseph. Like Joseph, Mordecai (who is also a descendent of Rachel) displayed patience, virtue and greatness.

¹⁸ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 87:5.

¹⁹ Ibid., 87:6.

²⁰ Midrash Shir ha-Shirim 1:1.

This midrash uses a proof-text that introduces the reader to the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. By overcoming temptation and not giving into her sexual advances, Joseph is seen as one who is "diligent in his business." By being diligent, Joseph is less easily drawn into sinning. In this particular midrash, Joseph's flawlessness allows him to be a leader of the Jews alone, and not of the Gentile world.²¹ Joseph's portrait has lost any sense of universalism that the early writings of Josephus and Philo attributed to him.

2. Joseph Shoulders Some of the Blame

For the Rabbis, Joseph is not beyond reproach. Perhaps to reflect their own reality, Joseph is seen as a flawed character who is deserving of some punishment.²² Of course, in the end Joseph will become a proven leader. To ultimately reach that exalted position, however, the Rabbis felt it was necessary to show how initially Joseph was selfish and not beyond sinning himself.

One midrash describes Joseph as haughty. According to this tradition, Joseph was upset that he was not subjected to a trial like his forefathers, Isaac and Jacob. This oversight dismays Joseph, so God responds by putting Joseph through a test harsher than the tests endured by his father and grandfather. The result is the episode of Potiphar's wife, described by midrash as a "she-bear."²³

Earlier in his life, Joseph is void of understanding and compassion. He returns from the field with "bad reports" of his brothers to his father, Jacob (Gen. 37:3). The

²¹ See also, Midrash Pesikta Rabbati, *pisqa* 6:2.

²² The Rabbis were constantly responding to the reality of their own situation. Although the Jews had enjoyed a history of independence and domination, symbolized at two different eras by Temples that stood in Jerusalem, their period of glory had ended. Throughout the Diaspora, Jews were now being persecuted. For the Rabbis, this state of affairs was brought about by the Jews themselves, as a result of their sinfulness. By turning away from God, the Rabbis believed that destruction and exile was God's just retribution.

²³ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 87:4.

Rabbis seize the opportunity to describe the bad reports. According to the tradition, Joseph slandered his brothers to Jacob, which is a reflection upon Joseph's youth and inexperience.²⁴ It is no wonder, then, when we find that Joseph's lack of discretion infuriates his brothers.

One tradition even criticizes Joseph later in life, when the brothers venture into Egypt to procure food rations. In the Talmud, Joseph is blamed for being stonefaced and cold to his brothers when they declare that "our father" Jacob is doing well.²⁵ Later in the narrative, right before Joseph dies, the Bible states, "So Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, 'When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here'" (Gen. 50:25). As a result, Joseph is referred to in Scripture as "bones," reflecting the harshness with which he treated his brothers.²⁶ Joseph's ostentatious behavior must be overcome before a full reconciliation with his brothers can occur.

Not surprisingly, the Rabbis accuse Joseph of being vain and immodest when working as a servant in Potiphar's household. Rashi comments that when Genesis describes Joseph as "fair and handsome," this shows that Joseph had not yet humbled himself and was gloating over his newfound fortune.²⁷

The Rabbinic tradition criticizes Joseph for many other character flaws. Joseph is described as a gossipmonger,²⁸ an immature youth,²⁹ and presumptuous.³⁰ Eventually, with God's guiding hand, Joseph overcomes his deficiencies and emerges as a hero to the

²⁴ Ibid., 87:1.

²⁵ T.B. *Sotah* 13b.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Rashi to Gen. 39:7.

²⁸ T.Y. *Peah* 1:1.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Radak to Gen. 39:11

Jewish people. God's presence eventually becomes a part of Joseph's moral fiber, and Joseph is likened to the *anshei levav* (men of understanding) described in Job 34:10.³¹

Joseph, therefore, is seen as a faulty character only in the later rabbinic traditions. The hope that the Jewish people would flourish under Roman rule gradually dissipated. Jews in the Diaspora became subjugated to ruthless governments, forcing the Jewish people to confront their identity crisis. How could God allow the "chosen people" to suffer so much? Was there no hope for the future of God's relationship with the Jews?

Joseph becomes the answer. Like all of us (and, especially, the Jews of the rabbinic era), Joseph sinned and lost his way before God. He was tested by God and had to learn humility and wisdom, but eventually he was elevated above kings. The Rabbis were holding out hope that the Jewish people, too, would be redeemed from sinning by God. The lesson we are taught is that experience is needed to gain wisdom, and an understanding of compassion for one another is needed for the individual to grow and succeed.

B. Judah: Flawed from the Beginning

Unlike Joseph, there is no debate among either the earlier or later sources as to how Judah should be viewed in the Joseph cycle. The Rabbis are in general agreement that Judah made many grave errors in judgment before he emerged as a leader within his family.

In the end, Judah will learn from his mistakes. He will repent and summon up within himself enough courage to confront his brother Joseph. But the Rabbis make it

³¹ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 87:3.

clear that Judah has to advance on a long, spiritual journey before making such a transformation.

The sources consistently are critical of Judah at a young age, when he and his brothers throw Joseph into the pit. After sitting down to a meal with Joseph languishing below, the brothers notice a caravan of Ishmaelites approaching. Judah then says to his brothers, "What do we profit (*betzah*) by killing our brother and covering up his blood?" (Gen. 37:26) The brothers agree, and they pull Joseph out of the pit and sell him to the travelers for twenty pieces of silver (Gen. 37:26-27).

On the surface, the reader may assume that Judah was a hero for saving Joseph's life. But this is not how the rabbinic tradition looks at Judah's role. Philo comments that all Judah did was substitute a lesser evil (selling Joseph into slavery) for a greater evil (murder).³² Josephus also gives Judah little credit. Judah simply wanted to rid himself of any guilt over what would become of Joseph, even though Judah knew that Joseph would probably die.³³ Judah's actions were in line with his personality – he had a "bold temper" that could not be pacified.³⁴

The Rabbis attribute significant importance to the word *betzah* (gain or profit) in Genesis 37:26. Inserting different vowels into the unvocalized text, one could read it to mean *botzeah* (unlawful benefit). By reading the verse to say, "What do we *profit*," the Bible leaves an unanswered question for the reader. Was Judah trying to do all that he could to save Joseph's life, or did he have an ulterior purpose? However, if one reads the verse to mean, "What is our *unlawful benefit*," we see that Judah's primary motivation is not in saving Joseph's life. The Talmud makes this distinction clear. Compromising a

³² Yonge, *The Works of Philo Josephus*, 456.

³³ Whiston, *The Works of Josephus*, 55.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 60, 63.

mitzvah, in this case the mitzvah of saving Joseph from slavery or even death, is a form of blasphemy against God.³⁵

In other words, Judah could have done more. He could have prevented Joseph from being sold into slavery. In Genesis 44, Judah is described as a lion, fierce and not afraid to stand up on behalf of justice and righteousness. Where was Judah's sense of justice when Joseph was sold into slavery? Judah failed early in his life because, according to the Rabbis, he would not do all that was within his power to save Joseph. Even though Judah performed the mitzvah of saving Joseph's life, in the eyes of God, Judah actually was guilty of blasphemy, for he failed to complete the mitzvah of preventing Joseph's enslavement.³⁶

The medieval commentators also note the play between *betzah* and *botzeah*. Rashi reads the word *botzeah* to mean "thief."³⁷ Rephrased, then, Judah actually exclaimed, "What *thievery* do we get by killing our brother?" Judah's intent is clear. He was not trying to save Joseph, but wanted to steal for himself by selling Joseph. The Midrash points out that the same unvocalized verb is repeated in Exodus 18:21, which states: "You shall also seek out from among the people capable men who fear God, trustworthy men who spurn ill-gotten gain (*vatzah*)."³⁸

Another possible translation of the verb *batzah* is "to break bread." Read this way, Judah was actually offering his brothers the opportunity to sit down and enjoy a meal while Joseph languished in the pit.³⁹ This type of cruelty amounts to blasphemy. Judah committed a sin against God, therefore, in furthering the discord among Jacob's

³⁵ T.Y. *Sanhedrin* 1:1.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Rashi to Gen. 37:26.

³⁸ Midrash Bereshit Rabbati to Gen. 37:26.

³⁹ Ibid.

family. He will have to properly repent before a reconciliation can occur. Just exactly what that entails is a question that the Rabbis will answer as the Biblical narrative continues to develop Judah's character.

Judah's failings are a foreshadowing of his later spiritual transformation.⁴⁰ Again, we see the hand of God in the development of Judah's character. His fateful mistake twenty-two years before reuniting with Joseph in Egypt underscores the leadership acumen that Judah finally will acquire. Eventually, in Genesis 44:18, we see Judah display the kind of leadership he so sorely lacked in his earlier years.

⁴⁰ The pit becomes a metaphor for Judah's spiritual journey. Like his brother, who was physically lowered into the pit, Judah also was spiritually lowered. Commenting on the opening line of chapter 38, which introduces the reader to the story of Judah and Tamar, Midrash Bereshit Rabbah states:

"Then Judah went down." It was a descent for him, for he buried his wife and his sons. R. Judah b. R. Simon and R. Hanan said in R. Jochanan's name: He who commences a good deed but does not finish it, buries his wife and children. From whom do you learn this? From Judah: "And Judah said to his brothers: 'What profit is it?'" Now he should have led him home in person to his father. What was the result? He buried his wife and children (Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 85:3).

Later, of course, Judah will ascend from this nadir. On his deathbed, Jacob will recognize Judah's spiritual development when he blesses him and tells Judah *alilah* (you have grown) (Gen. 49:9).

Chapter 3

Joseph Matures in Egypt

A. Joseph and Potiphar's Wife

A dramatic shift takes place in Joseph's character the moment he arrives in Egypt. The Bible tells us that Joseph is sold to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh (Gen 39:1). God was with Joseph, however, and eventually Potiphar made Joseph master of his entire house (Gen. 29:2-4). Yet, because Joseph was so handsome, he drew the leers of Potiphar's wife, who made daily sexual advances to Joseph (Gen. 39:6-7). Scripture reads:

And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, "Lie with me." But he refused, and said to his master's wife, "Behold, my master, having me, does not know what is in the house, and he has put all that he has into my hand. He is not greater in this house than I. Neither has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" And it came to pass, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not hearken to her, to lie by her, or to be with her (Gen. 39:7-10).

Potiphar's wife, frustrated at Joseph's refusals, tells her husband that Joseph was the one making the advances. As a result, Potiphar has Joseph thrown into prison (Gen. 39:11-20).

Why does the Bible relate this story? On its face, it does not seem to further the narrative of reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers. For that matter, neither Jacob nor any of his other sons are even mentioned in this tale. The Rabbis, however, see the episode as a defining moment in Joseph's character. Joseph is being tested. Like all of us at many points throughout our lives, Joseph is confronted with a moral dilemma. He must choose between giving in to his passions or remaining loyal to his family, his master, and ultimately to his God. In this way, the story of Potiphar's wife illustrates how Joseph continues his journey of maturation so that he can one day face his brothers again.

1. Key Elements of Joseph's Maturation Process

Every person is faced with at least a few fateful moments during his or her lifetime. Inevitably, an opportunity presents itself wherein a person must decide upon a specific course of action. Responding to Potiphar's wife becomes such a moment of choice for Joseph. The midrashim make a point of showing us how time, experience, and a desire to act righteously will allow Joseph to respond appropriately to her advances.

A necessary element in Joseph's maturation process is time. In Genesis 39:10, the Bible tells us that Potiphar's wife spoke to Joseph *yom yom* (daily). Ibn Ezra states that a full year had passed during which time Potiphar's wife constantly demanded that Joseph sleep with her.⁴¹ Joseph had time to think of his reaction, and to formulate his response. He developed the discretion to wait long enough so that he could think of a proper course of action. Ironically, Joseph lacked this discretion when he immediately blurted out his interpretations of his dreams to his father and brothers in Canaan. This time, however, Joseph has learned the virtue of patience.

Another key element the Rabbis identify is that of Joseph's humility. Bereshit Rabbah states:

'His master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph' (Gen. 39:7). What precedes this passage? 'And Joseph was of beautiful form, and fair to look upon' (Gen. 39:6). 'His master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph.' It may be illustrated by a man who sat in the street, penciling his eyes, curling his hair and lifting his heel, while he exclaimed, 'I am indeed a man.' 'If you are a man,' the bystanders retorted, 'here is a bear. Up and attack it!'⁴²

In this midrash, Potiphar's wife is the bear, and the test is one of Joseph's humility. If he is indeed vain about his appearance, he will surely fail the test. Because he has lost any

⁴¹ Ibn Ezra to Gen. 39:10.

⁴² Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 87:3.

sense of vanity, however, he is able to refuse Potiphar's wife. Joseph has learned how to be modest, an effective trait for any leader. Moreover, with humility comes a sense of shame, if one acts inappropriately. According to tradition, Joseph was humble enough to think of his father when responding to Potiphar's wife.⁴³ A naïve or immodest man would not feel any shame over how his family regarded his actions.

According to tradition, only with God's help is Joseph able to pass the test of Potiphar's wife's seduction. In the Book of Job, we read, "Therefore hearken to me, you men of understanding: Far be it from God that He should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that He should commit iniquity."⁴⁴ The Rabbis declare that only God is the ultimate source of a man finding his way through life,⁴⁵ since God was with Joseph when Potiphar's wife made her advances.⁴⁶ Like Job, who was tested in a match between God and Satan, Joseph can find the strength to resist Potiphar's wife only with God by his side.

By likening Joseph's test to the test of Job, the Rabbis stress that much more is at stake than just Joseph's position as Potiphar's overseer. Joseph is in a test of wills that has good pitted against evil. Of course, if Joseph is to be understood by the Rabbis as a paradigm of wise discernment, then it makes sense that Potiphar's wife should represent the opposite. Josephus comments that Potiphar's wife was not capable of seeing Joseph's "moral character" – his inner beauty – but instead was consumed with his outer beauty.⁴⁷

By being mindful of God when the moment of decision was upon Joseph, and by not violating the commandment against stealing, the Rabbis tell us that God rewarded

⁴³ Ibid., and Rashi to Gen. 39:11.

⁴⁴ Job 34:10.

⁴⁵ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 87:3.

⁴⁶ Midrash Numbers Rabbah 14:6.

⁴⁷ Whiston, *The Works of Josephus*, 55-56.

Joseph.⁴⁸ Joseph's reward was twofold: first, he was allowed to be with his father when Jacob died; second (and more important), Joseph was able to come closer to God.⁴⁹ Having learned all of these attributes, and having kept God in his heart, Joseph is prepared to respond to his master's wife.

2. The Moment of Truth: Joseph Rebukes Potiphar's Wife

Genesis 39:11 begins the narrative of the fateful day that Joseph must give Potiphar's wife a final rebuke. The Bible states, "And it came to pass on a certain day, when he went into the house to do his work..." (Gen. 39:11).

Exactly what was this work that Joseph went in to perform? According to the Rabbis, Joseph went in to take a *chesbon* for his master.⁵⁰ The word *chesbon* should be understood here as having two distinct meanings. In a literal sense it means that Joseph went in to do some accounting work for Potiphar. On a spiritual level, however, the Rabbis are hinting at what must be done before Joseph can respond to Potiphar's wife. Joseph had to undergo a spiritual accounting of his soul, a *chesbon ha-nefesh*.

Joseph's spiritual reckoning becomes his strength during the moment of temptation. In a beautiful midrash, Joseph suddenly sees before him a vision of his father's face.⁵¹ One can only imagine the multiple faces of Jacob that confronted Joseph at this moment. Perhaps he saw the face of beguilement, as when Jacob stole his brother's birthright. Or perhaps he saw a face of regret, as when Jacob feared his

⁴⁸ Mechilta d'Rabbi Shimon b. Yohai to Exod. 13:19.

⁴⁹ Pesikta d'Rav Kahana, *piska* 14:2. This Midrash references Prov. 1:33, which states, "But whoever *shomea-li* (hearkens to Me) will dwell securely, and will be quiet without fear of evil." The Rabbis see a connection between this verse and Gen. 39:10, which states, "And it came to pass, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not *shoma* (hearken) to her."

⁵⁰ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 87:7.

⁵¹ Ibid.

brother's wrath for years before they reconciled. Maybe Joseph saw the face of mourning, as when Jacob was told that a beast had killed Joseph. Whatever face Joseph saw at this moment, Joseph was rewarded for not giving into the temptations of Potiphar's wife by being able to close his father's eyes at Jacob's death (Gen. 46:10).⁵²

Joseph knows that there will be serious repercussions once he refuses Potiphar's wife. Nevertheless, Joseph was not afraid of the consequences of his refusal. The Talmud relates that he refused Potiphar's wife even though she threatened him with prison, blindness, disease, and even tried to bribe him to sleep with her.⁵³ Joseph realizes that he is in a subservient position in Potiphar's house, and that his word will never be believed over the word of his master's wife. Nevertheless, Joseph is resolute in his denial, even if it means that Potiphar's wife will seek revenge by telling her husband that it was Joseph, in fact, who made the sexual advances.

As a result of Joseph's righteousness, the Rabbis portray Joseph as one who was willing to sacrifice his own well-being in order to prevent himself from sinning before God. The midrashim tell us that Joseph is a brave and courageous leader who is even willing to be sacrificed like Abraham and Isaac before giving in to Potiphar's wife.⁵⁴ Joseph knows that by sleeping with Potiphar's wife, not only will he be punished in this world, but also in *ha-olam habah* (the world to come).⁵⁵

⁵² Pesikta d'Rav Kahana, *piska* 14:2.

⁵³ T.B. *Yoma* 35b.

⁵⁴ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 87:5.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

B. Joseph Grows Up: Interpreting Dreams, Aiding Pharaoh, and Testing his Brothers

While there are many midrashim which address Joseph's maturation process in the episode with Potiphar's wife, there are also other instances in which the Rabbis note Joseph's development while he is in Egypt. The Rabbis have created a tradition of using those instances as a guide to understanding how a person is capable of evolving into an effective leader. Each episode seems to build upon the previous one, so that by the time Joseph reveals his true identity to his brothers, the reader has already witnessed an incredible transformation in Joseph's character. The midrashic sources give us a roadmap of how a person can become a righteous and praiseworthy leader.

1. Joseph, the Prisoner

After Joseph rebukes Potiphar's wife, Potiphar has Joseph thrown into prison (Gen. 39:20). The Bible tells us that while in prison, God was present in Joseph's life. God even caused the prison warden to take a liking to Joseph (Gen. 39:21-22). As a result, the warden made Joseph a steward over all of the other prisoners (Gen. 39:23).

Eventually Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker were thrown into prison with Joseph. The Bible says, "The two of them dreamt a dream, each one had his dream on the same night, each one according to the interpretation of his dream – the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt who were confined in the prison" (Gen. 40:5). Proclaiming his faith in God, Joseph successfully interprets their dreams (Gen. 40:9-22). How he is able to do this is a question that the Rabbis will answer.

In interpreting the cupbearer's dream, we see that Joseph seems to have acquired a sense of justice and fairness. Bereshit Rabbah comments, "He [Joseph] said to him: 'You have given me good tidings, so I will also give you good tidings.'"⁵⁶ Joseph senses in interpreting the cupbearer's dream that God is still with him and will eventually redeem him. He rewards the cupbearer by telling him that eventually he will be restored to Pharaoh's household. Joseph's sense of justice dictates to him that since the cupbearer foretold Joseph's good fortune, he should not hold back in relating what will happen to the cupbearer.

Joseph seemingly has even learned a lesson about standing up for himself. Prior to Joseph interpreting the cupbearer's dream, we never once hear Joseph formally protest against any of the injustices that have befallen him. Here, however, he does not hold back. Imploring the cupbearer to remember Joseph to Pharaoh when the cupbearer is released, Joseph states, "Indeed, I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing for them to have put me in the pit" (Gen. 40:15). Joseph's use of the Hebrew word *bor* (pit) alludes to the first time Joseph was thrown down into a pit by his brothers (Gen. 37:24). There, Joseph did not protest. Now, however, Joseph has learned to stand up for himself.

The maturation of a person's character must be continual, however, and Joseph still has much to learn. Commenting on how the cupbearer failed to obtain Joseph's freedom from Pharaoh, a midrash faults Joseph for putting too much faith in a man.⁵⁷ Instead, Joseph should have remembered that God is the ultimate redeemer.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 88:5.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 88:7.

⁵⁸ As a result of forgetting to put his faith in God, and relying instead upon a man, two years was added to Joseph's sentence! Ibid., 89:3.

Apparently, the Rabbis are teaching us that the growth of one's character is a never-ending process, and that God is the ultimate source of wholeness for any human being.

2. Joseph, the Dream Weaver

Years later, Pharaoh dreams about cows and ears of grain (Gen. 41:1-7). The cupbearer remembers Joseph's ability to interpret dreams, and informs Pharaoh, who immediately sends for Joseph (Gen 41:9-14). Joseph successfully interprets the dream. Pharaoh is so impressed he appoints Joseph as the Vizier of Egypt (Gen. 41:25-38). At the conclusion of Joseph's interpretation, Pharaoh exclaims, "Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?" (Gen. 41:38)

The Rabbis attribute Joseph's ability to successfully interpret Pharaoh's dream to God's providence:

Now the Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'If Joseph comes at first and interprets the dream, he will gain no praise, for the magicians will be able to say to him, "Had you asked us, we would long ago have interpreted it for you."' Therefore God waited until they were wearied and had exhausted his [Pharaoh's] spirit, and then Joseph came and restored it. Concerning him, Solomon said, 'A fool spends all his spirit' (Prov. 29:11), which refers to Pharaoh's magicians; 'But a wise man stills it within him' (ibid.), alludes to Joseph, as it says, 'There is none so discreet and wise as you' (Gen. 41:39).⁵⁹

Ultimately, then, Joseph's wisdom comes from God. Although time and experience are necessary before one can gain insight and good judgment, as was evidenced by Joseph's tenure in prison, the true source of wisdom is the Almighty.

Joseph has learned a lot while languishing in prison. When he is informed that he is to be taken to Pharaoh, he shows respect for royalty by shaving himself and changing

⁵⁹ Ibid., 89:6.

his clothes.⁶⁰ Respect for authority is something that Joseph lacked in his younger years when he brought home bad reports of his brothers to Jacob. Now, with God on his mind, and equipped with a renewed sense of humility, Joseph is prepared for his interactions with Pharaoh.

3. Joseph, the Tester

Pharaoh's dream comes true and Joseph becomes an effective leader. He uses the seven years of growth as an opportunity to store food to prepare for the seven years of famine (Gen. 41:49-57). Joseph had proven to be such a competent administrator that when the Egyptians cried for food at the beginning of the famine, Pharaoh declared, "Go to Joseph. What he says to you, you will do" (Gen. 41:55).

Up to this point in the narrative, Joseph has acquired much wisdom and maturity. However, as the midrashim make clear, one's spiritual growth never truly ceases. In Joseph's case, he will learn yet another valuable lesson of important leadership skills when his brothers venture to Egypt during the famine to obtain food.

Joseph has not forgotten what his brothers did to him twenty-two years earlier. Accordingly, he puts the brothers through a series of tests to see what they are now like. Joseph's first encounter with his brothers is one fraught with both apprehension and optimism. Joseph is understandably hesitant given all that has happened to him. He needs to know that his brothers have changed. Yet, by testing his brothers, he is hopeful that such a transformation has occurred. He wants his brothers to show that they have repented and changed.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 89:9, and Rashi to Gen. 41:14.

The series of tests set forth by Joseph provide us with insight into what Joseph values in life. He is concerned for Jacob, and so he asks if the brothers have a father. He inquires about Benjamin, and asks the brothers if there are any other family members (Gen. 44:19). Lastly, he desperately wants to reconcile with his brothers, but must first be convinced that the brothers have atoned for their prior evilness.

The Midrash describes these sentiments in the following narrative:

'And Joseph's ten brother's went down' (Gen.42:3). Scripture should have said, 'Jacob's sons.' Why 'Joseph's brothers?' In the beginning they did not treat him with brotherly love, but sold him; later, however, they regretted it. Every day they would say, 'Let us go and inquire about him and restore him to his father.' And when Jacob told them to go down to Egypt, they all agreed to show him brotherly love. R. Judah b. R. Simon said, 'Joseph, too, knew that his brothers were coming down to Egypt. What did he do? He set guards at the ten gates and ordered them to record the names of all who entered....Several days passed but they did not arrive. He sent for them and found them in the street of prostitutes. What were they doing there? They thought, "Maybe because he was of handsome appearance he was set in a prostitute's tent." They were arrested and brought to Joseph. 'And Joseph saw his brothers, and he knew them, but made himself strange to them' (Gen. 42:7)." What does the last phrase mean? That he made himself a stranger to them. He took his cup, struck it, and proclaimed, 'You are spies' (*Ibid*). 'We are upright men,' they replied (Gen. 42:11). 'If you are upright, why did you not all enter through one gate?' 'Our father told us to act this way,' they replied. 'And what was your business in the street of prostitutes?' 'We have lost something and were searching for it.' 'I see in my cup that two of you destroyed a great city and that you sold your brother to the Arabs,' he told them. They were immediately seized with trembling and exclaimed, 'We are twelve.' 'Where then are the other two?' 'One is dead and the other is with our father.' 'Then go and bring him to me,' he ordered them.... [A]nd when Joseph saw him [Benjamin] he rejoiced, because he was like his mother.⁶¹

This Midrash is so forceful because it tells us what Joseph was thinking as he was testing his brothers. There was something about Joseph that made him think his brothers would search for him. He sensed that his brothers somehow felt regret for what they had done, and so he gave instructions to look for them.

⁶¹ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 91:3.

Moreover, when the brothers arrive, the midrash tells us that Joseph made himself a stranger to them. This accords with the Biblical narrative, which states, "Joseph saw his brothers and he recognized them, but he acted like a stranger toward them and spoke to them harshly" (Gen. 42:7). Joseph shows great restraint. He does not play his hand so quickly so as to reveal himself, and he obviously is not intent on executing revenge. Instead, he needs to know that the brothers have changed, that they are capable of being truthful and honest. As a result, he refuses to divulge his true identity and tests them.

Most importantly, however, is Joseph's display of compassion for his family. The midrash concludes by Joseph inquiring of his only full brother, Benjamin. After so much agonizing time, years in which he has ascended to the second most powerful position in Egypt, changed his name, taken an Egyptian wife and started a family of his own, Joseph does not fail to remember the one brother who was innocent of any wrongdoing when Joseph was sold into slavery. For Joseph, Benjamin also represents the embodiment of their shared mother, Rachel.

Joseph has indeed traveled a long way, both physically and spiritually, from the haughty, naïve youth he formerly was in Canaan. He has been estranged from his family for most of his life. The midrashim teach us, however, that no estrangement is necessarily permanent. Instead, every family has the ability to compromise and reconcile their differences. The ingredients for such a reconciliation include all of the parties to the estrangement, whether they are innocent or guilty of having caused the rift. Benjamin and Jacob were not present when Joseph was sold into slavery, but they are central figures in the eventual reconciliation. And if the reconciliation is to happen, then Judah,

the leader of the brothers, and the one who had an opportunity to save Joseph but failed.
will also have to prove that he has matured in the same way as his brother Joseph.

Chapter 4

Judah's Maturation

A. Episodes of Maturation.

Judah's character development in the Bible is evident in specific instances of his maturation process. At the end of the Joseph cycle, in Genesis 44, Judah will have the strength and courage to confront his brother, Joseph. But to get to that point, he needs to go through a series of tests. What are those tests, and how do they transform Judah? What does Judah need to do to change from being a selfish, unsympathetic person to a caring, penitent soul? Through the midrashim, the Rabbis provide us with the answer. Judah must transform his entire body in order to be able to stand up against Joseph. He must learn to love his family, he must learn the value of righteousness, and, most importantly, he must have God's presence enter his very being.

1. Judah and Tamar

Genesis 38 recounts the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar. After his first son Er dies, Judah had his second son, Onan, marry Tamar, according to the ancient Levirate marriage laws (Gen. 38: 6-8). Onan was unwilling to have a child who would not be counted as his own. He intentionally prevented the possibility of his impregnating Tamar, because such a baby would be known as his brother's firstborn, and would reduce the inheritance that Onan would be able to pass down to his own children. Since what he did was a sin against God, Onan died (Gen. 38:9-10).

Tamar was once again a widow. After Onan's death, she should have then married Judah's third son, Shelah, whom she was obligated to marry according to Levirate law. However, Judah prevented this marriage from happening. Judah feared that Shelah, too, would meet his death by marrying Tamar (Gen. 38:11).

After waiting patiently to marry Shelah, and finally realizing that it was not to be, Tamar decides to take matters into her own hands. She dresses herself up as a harlot and waits by the road for Judah, so that she can seduce him. Judah notices her as he is traveling, sleeps with her, and leaves his seal and cord as a pledge for payment. When he tries to redeem it, the "harlot" cannot be found (Gen. 38:12-23).

Three months later, Judah is told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot; in fact, she is with child by harlotry" (Gen. 38:24). Judah does not know that the harlot he slept with three months earlier is in fact his daughter-in-law. Tamar is brought out before everyone in the town, and Judah sentences her to death by burning (Gen. 38:24).

Although Tamar is guilty of the charges brought against her, she knows that the one who is sentencing her, Judah, is also the one who impregnated her. Tamar produces Judah's seal and cord, confirming that it was Judah who slept with her. Judah immediately recognizes them as the pledge that he gave the harlot. He finally realizes that he, too, has sinned. He recognizes that he has not performed his lawful duty of giving Tamar to Shelah in marriage (Gen. 38:25-26). Judah states before all of the townspeople, "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah" (Gen. 38:26).⁶² He comes to recognize what he has done and who he is.

The midrashim use this story as an opportunity to delve deeply into the character of Judah. What do we learn from the confession that Judah makes? Not only has Judah

⁶² Scholarly debate exists over the connection between Genesis 38 and the rest of the Joseph narrative. Such a debate is beyond the scope of this paper. For a source that persuasively argues that Chapter 38 is indeed connected to the rest of the narrative, see Aaron Wildavsky, "Survival Must not be Gained Through Sin: The Moral of the Joseph Stories Prefigured through Judah and Tamar." *Journal for the Study of Old Testament* 62 (1994): 37-48. According to the rabbinic tradition, however, it should be noted that the story of Judah and Tamar is very much intertwined with the overall narrative of Joseph and his brothers, as explained above.

gained wisdom, but he also has finally learned to admit when he is wrong. The Rabbis, in interpreting the story of Judah and Tamar, teach us what is necessary to make a true confession that shows remorse and a desire to change at the same time.

The Rabbis do this by concentrating on the Hebrew word for confession, *hoda'ah*, as a basis for understanding Judah's transformation. *Hoda'ah* can also mean "to praise," and, of course, it is a part of Judah's name, *Yehuda*, as a midrash states, "When she [Leah] gave birth to Judah, she immediately praised (*hoda'h*) God on his account since he would eventually confess (*hoda'h*) in the Tamar episode."⁶³ Another midrash states:

Rabbi Levi said...Leah grasped the spindle of praising and all her sons were masters of praising. [Regarding] Judah: "And Judah recognized them and said..." (Gen. 38:26). [Regarding] David: "Give thanks (*hodu*) to God for He is good" (Ps. 136:1). [Regarding] Daniel: "I thank you and praise (*hodeh*) you, for you are the God of my father" (Dan. 2:23).⁶⁴

Judah's name, therefore, encapsulates the essence of who Judah has become.⁶⁵ Judah is one who recognizes when he has done the wrong thing, and confesses his wrongdoing. His very name is a testament to this developing character trait.

Judah, by confessing, becomes a model of leadership for others to follow, according to the rabbinic tradition:

When Reuben saw Judah he also stood and confessed his deed.⁶⁶ Who inspired whom? We say that Judah inspired Reuben since he repented for his deed. Scripture says of them, "That which wise men have told and have not withheld from their fathers" (Job 15:18).⁶⁷

Reuben had laid with his father's handmaiden, Bilhah (Gen. 35:22). When Joseph is about to die, he says of Reuben, "For when you mounted your father's bed, you brought

⁶³ Midrash Tanhuma Buber, *Vayechi* 9; see also, C.E. Hayes, "The Midrashic Career of the Confession of Judah (Genesis 38:26)." *Vetus Testamentum* 45 (1995): Part II, 174-87.

⁶⁴ T.B. *Sotah* 10b, Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 71:4, Midrash Tanhuma Buber, *Vayechi* 12.

⁶⁵ Hayes, "The Midrashic Career of the Confession," 174.

⁶⁶ Reuben also sinned by having sexual intercourse with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine (Gen. 35:22).

⁶⁷ Sifre Devarim, *piska* 248.

disgrace! My couch you mounted!" (Gen. 49:4) Judah is seen as the model of confession and repentance that inspired Reuben's confession and his repentance for his sexual transgression.⁶⁸

Judah's confession is more than just a sign of his qualification for leadership. It is also a sign of his true desire to change, and as a result, his willingness to openly admit his guilt. The Rabbis teach this lesson by pointing out that Judah's confession was made publicly, before all of the people in the town to hear. The Talmud states:

Judah recognized them [the cord and seal] and said, "She is more righteous than I" (Gen. 38:26). This is what R. Hanin said...: "Joseph who sanctified the name of heaven privately merited the addition of one letter from the name of the Holy One, Blessed be He, to his name... Judah, who sanctified the name of heaven in public merited that he should be called entirely by the name of God,⁶⁹ because he confessed and said, 'She is more righteous than I.' A divine voice came forth and said, 'You saved Tamar and her two sons from the fire. I promise that on account of your merit I will save some of your offspring from the fire.'"⁷⁰

Not only is Judah praiseworthy for his repentance, but he also merits a reward for making his confession publicly known. The Rabbis clearly demonstrate here that there is something special about being able to admit that you are wrong to the entire community. In Judah's case, God gives him a special reward for making such a public confession.

The comparison between Joseph and Judah in this midrash is an interesting one, in that Joseph's rejection of Potiphar's wife was always kept private by Joseph. Joseph never publicly defends himself and tells Potiphar of his rejection of Potiphar's wife:

Rather than seeing in Joseph's resistance to the advances of Potiphar's wife an implicit condemnation of Judah's conduct with a woman he took to be a prostitute, the midrash reverses the direction of the comparison. What emerges from a comparison of Joseph and Judah is this: Joseph's resistance, though praiseworthy, was after all a private *qiddush hashem* (sanctification of the Name), and was therefore of limited merit. On the other hand, although Judah was

⁶⁸ Hayes, "The Midrashic Career of the Confession," 176.

⁶⁹ In other words, four of the five letters of Judah's name are also the letters of the Tetragrammaton.

⁷⁰ T.B. *Sotah* 10b; see also, Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah 13.4.

actually guilty of sexual misconduct (unlike Joseph), he confessed his act in a public setting, and a public *qiddush hashem* has greater merit than a private one. The fact that he sinned pales to insignificance in the light of his public confession.⁷¹

Judah is praiseworthy, as his name implies, because he had enough courage to admit his error publicly. The Midrash values this higher than even Joseph's rejection of Potiphar's wife.

Finally, the rabbinic tradition attributes God's presence to Judah's confession. Judah could not have known to confess, nor could he have humbled himself enough to confess, were it not for God's presence within him. The Bible states, "God has made Himself known in Judah" (Ps. 76:2). The Rabbis inform us that this verse refers to Judah's confession regarding Tamar.⁷² Furthermore, because God was present when he confessed, Judah will be rewarded by God. According to the tradition, God rewards Judah's confession by making him the father of the Davidic line that eventually will rule all of Israel.⁷³

2. Judah, Benjamin and Jacob

We can also look to Judah's relationship with his youngest brother, Benjamin, as a way to evaluate Judah's character. Judah seemingly never cared too much for his family. Besides selling Joseph into slavery, he did not seem to have any concern over the fact that his father would grieve upon hearing about Joseph's death. He even cared so little for his family that he left his brothers and set up camp in another land (Gen. 38:1).

⁷¹ Hayes, "The Midrashic Career of the Confession," 177.

⁷² Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah 13:4.

⁷³ Midrash Shemot Rabbah 30:19.

Eventually, however, Judah becomes a compassionate brother and a loving son. A transformation takes place in Judah's character, and he becomes a leader in his family. Indeed, he even offers to become a slave to Joseph on behalf of his brother, Benjamin. In Genesis 44:32, Judah tells Joseph, "Now your servant has pledged himself for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I shall stand guilty before my father forever.'" This is the same Judah who earlier callously said to his father with his brothers, "We found this. Please examine it. Is it your son's tunic or not?" (Gen. 37:33)

The rabbinic tradition tells us why Judah stood up for Benjamin. Rashi explains that Judah's pledge included not only a promise to his father Jacob, but also to God. By pledging himself to stand in the place of Benjamin if he is not returned, Rashi explains that Judah also pledged his soul to God.⁷⁴ Judah risked being banished in both the physical world and in the world hereafter. If Benjamin did not return to his father safely, Judah would not only be banished to Egypt to become a slave, he would also be banished from *olam ha-bah* (the world to come).⁷⁵

Why did Judah act in such a compassionate manner? He had already shown that he was only concerned about himself when he sold Joseph into slavery and then left his brothers. The answer is simple, yet powerful. According to the midrash, Judah discovered love.⁷⁶ Judah discovered a deep desire to love his family, and that is what motivated him to stand in Benjamin's place.

Benjamin, of course, represents a biological link to Joseph. The midrashim pick up on this fact and attribute Judah's display of love and concern for Benjamin in a way that parallels his eventual love and concern for Joseph. Midrash Psalms makes this

⁷⁴ Rashi to Gen. 44:32.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Midrash Lekach Tov to Gen. 44:29.

connection, noting that Joseph is the only full brother of Benjamin, who in turn is inextricably bound up with Judah through Judah's pledge.⁷⁷ Judah's love for Benjamin, Josephus tells us, is so strong that he is even willing to die for his brother.⁷⁸

Love is also the motivating factor that brings Judah spiritually closer to his father, Jacob. Judah expresses his love for his father when he confronts Joseph at the end of Genesis 44. Quoting what Jacob had said before the brothers left for Egypt, Judah tells Joseph, "If you take this one [Benjamin] from me, too, and he meets with disaster, you will send my white head down to Sheol in grief" (Gen. 44:29). Judah displays his heartfelt concern for causing his father additional grief, should something happen to Benjamin. The Rabbis make it clear that Judah is not just plagued by guilt over causing his father such anguish over what Jacob believes to be the death of Joseph. Bereshit Rabbah relates that Judah's motivation is the love that he has for his father.⁷⁹ Judah cannot stand to watch his father grieve over news that Benjamin will not return, a concern that Judah did not display earlier when Joseph was sold.

B. Judah's Spiritual Transformation.

Judah's maturation process involved more than just words and actions. Something also changed inside of him spiritually. It is only reasonable to assume that Judah could not have acted so sincerely towards Tamar, Benjamin and Jacob had he not felt a desire in his soul to act righteously and compassionately.

The Rabbis use Judah's transformation as a teaching opportunity. They expound upon Judah's actions by understanding the spiritual transformation that Judah must have

⁷⁷ Midrash Psalms 5:1.

⁷⁸ Whiston, *The Works of Josephus* 56.

⁷⁹ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 93:8.

experienced. We can learn much from the Rabbis about what can be gained in making such a spiritual transformation.

Judah is willing to learn from his past mistakes. This is the lesson the Rabbis teach in the episode of Tamar. Having already sinned before God by not saving Joseph, Judah is not about to make the same mistake with his daughter-in-law and allow Tamar to be burned. Judah has gained experience, insight, and sensitivity despite his earlier missteps.

As mentioned above, God was a necessary element in Judah's decision to act righteously. However, the Rabbis make a distinction between being aware of God when tempted to sin, and having God's presence with you as one journeys through life. Judah seemed to become aware of God in the episode with Tamar. However, his spiritual connection to God occurred on a much deeper and spiritual level, according to rabbinic tradition.

One midrash explains how God guided Judah through his spiritual journey. When the brothers return from Egypt to Jacob, they recount their conversation with Joseph.

Aggadat Bereshit states:

When they came to Jacob, they said to him: "What do you think, that the Vizier of Egypt said anything to us? There is no one more compassionate than he! But one man - we do not know from where the Holy One sent him - stood up and brought charges about us before him, as is stated, 'The man, the master of the land, spoke harshly to us...(Gen. 42:30). And the man said to us: You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you (Gen. 43:5).'" He [Jacob] said to them, "You have to have mercy on that man, who brought charges against you, as is stated, 'May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man' (Gen. 43:14), and not only before him, but before all the nations, as is stated, 'And forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions that they have committed against you; and grant them compassion in the sight of their captors, so that they may have compassion on them'" (I Kings 8:50).⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Midrash Aggadat Bereshit 75.

On its surface, "the man" referred to in this midrash is just a mortal being, the Vizier of Egypt. Jacob states that the Vizier is deserving of compassion and mercy, even though he is being harsh on Jacob's sons. However, earlier in this same midrash, the Rabbis state that "the man" who directed Joseph to his brothers when Jacob instructed him to check on his brothers in the field, was not any mortal being, but was in fact an angel.⁸¹ Of course, "the man" that the brothers are now referring to is more than just the Vizier of Egypt. He is Joseph, a member of Jacob's household and a king of the household of Israel. God is within Joseph, and so "the man" who sends Judah and his brothers back to Jacob is actually an angel.

God, therefore, is becoming a part of Judah's life. The wisdom and experience he gains is secondary to the presence of God that transforms him from within. As a result of God's presence, Judah becomes a man possessed with logic and reason.⁸² Furthermore, Judah becomes a man of insight and wisdom who is capable of caring for others. The Rabbis credit Judah with finally understanding the difference between acting out of "sinfulness" and acting out of "righteousness."⁸³ Only through God's presence in his life is Judah able to gain such wisdom, insight, logic and reason.

⁸¹ "When his father sent him to his brothers, he was lost, and the angel that was sent by the Holy One to guard him, found him, as is stated, 'A man found him wandering in the fields' (Gen. 37:1)." Ibid.

⁸² Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 93:6.

⁸³ Midrash Lekach Tov to Gen. 44:18.

Chapter 5

Teshuvah: Judah Repents for his Sins

A. Element's of Judah's Repentance

Webster's defines "repent" as a verb, meaning "to turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one's life; to feel regret or contrition."⁸⁴

As we have seen, a key factor in Judah's maturation process involved his ability to confess his wrongdoings. However, confessing is different than repenting. In Hebrew, the word for repentance is *teshuvah*. As with other Hebrew words, *teshuvah* has many different meanings. *Teshuvah* can also mean "to return" and "to reply, to answer."⁸⁵ As we will see in the way the Rabbis view Judah, *teshuvah* means all these things at once: confession, returning, and responding.

Judah's public confessional regarding Tamar can be viewed as a type of response. Instead of thinking only of himself, he finally is able to respond to the needs of someone else. His daughter-in-law Tamar had been denied by Judah her lawful right of Levirate marriage, and at the end of the story Judah finally responds to her demand in an appropriate manner. But this is only one element of *teshuvah*. The Rabbis look for clues in the Biblical text to see what other elements of Judah's actions and words amount to a complete and sincere *teshuvah*. The Rabbis explain that one must do much more than just make a public confessional. It is also necessary that one be able to respond correctly to those against whom one has sinned. In Judah's case, the Rabbis will point out how Judah responded in an appropriate manner. Moreover, the Rabbis will analyze Judah's "return" to God. They will make a point of reading into the Biblical text the idea that Judah turned his soul to God as part of his *teshuvah*.

⁸⁴ Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1973): 272.

⁸⁵ Jastrow, Marcus, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Pardes, 1950): 1703.

The notion of “responding” as a way of performing *teshuvah* is used as a metaphor in the Rabbinic tradition. When the brothers are accused by Joseph of being spies, they answer, “We, your servants, were twelve brothers, sons of a certain man in the land of Canaan; the youngest, however, is now with our father, and one is no more” (Gen. 42:13). According to Rashi, the brothers thought that they were being accused of spying because of the way they each entered Egypt separately, a move that would arouse suspicion in the eyes of any government official.⁸⁶ To explain their odd way of entering the land, the brothers continued with their response. They explained to Joseph, “And because of that one who is gone [Joseph], we dispersed through the city to search for him.”⁸⁷

Rashi makes a play on the verb *l'vakesh* (to search for), which can also mean either “to request,” or “to appease.” Rashi sees Judah and his brothers as taking an active role in searching for their brother Joseph. Doing *teshuvah* means that one must be proactive in responding to a wrong that has earlier been committed. Here, the brothers are making such a response by actively trying to find Joseph in order to return him to their family. Furthermore, the brothers are responding to Joseph’s inquiry, which can only be heartening to Joseph’s ears. Joseph must be pleased because he now knows that his brothers care for him and want to make amends. Every element of *teshuvah*, confessing, returning, and responding, is present in this midrashic tradition.

Another tradition also makes it clear that “responding” is a necessary element in doing *teshuvah*. Judah’s speech to Joseph right before Joseph reveals his true identity to them is seen through the rabbinic tradition as a form of doing “*teshuvah*.” Judah’s

⁸⁶ Rashi to Gen. 42:13.

⁸⁷ Ibid., and Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 91:6.

impassioned plea is a "response" to Joseph's demand that Benjamin be taken as a slave. In recounting what has happened thus far to Judah and his brothers, Judah begins by saying, "We told my lord..." (Gen. 44:20). Midrash Lekach Tov explains that Judah was speaking on behalf of all of his brothers, including Benjamin, and even Jacob.⁸⁸ Judah's response is one that is spoken on behalf of the entire family of Jacob. He demands to take the place of Benjamin and to let him be returned to his father, Jacob. Not surprisingly, by speaking on behalf of all of his brothers and his father, Judah was rewarded. The line of Judah was designated as the tribe that had the honor of giving the first gifts at the Temple that was later built in Jerusalem.⁸⁹

The act of standing as a pledge for his brother Benjamin, according to the tradition, merits Judah the kingship over the Jewish people.⁹⁰ Judah's offer is both a promise to "return" Benjamin, and an appeasing of Jacob and of Joseph. When Joseph was thrown into the pit, Judah had an opportunity to return Joseph to his father, and to spiritually return to God. He failed on both accounts. Now, twenty-two years later, by placing himself in Benjamin's stead and acting as his surety, Judah is atoning for having failed to complete the mitzvah of saving Joseph.⁹¹ He is offering to return Benjamin, while at the same time spiritually returning his soul to God. Benjamin, as the only full brother to Joseph, is spiritually attached to Joseph, whose name (*Yosef* – "an addition to") is a reminder of that attachment. Judah's act encompasses all of the necessary elements

⁸⁸ Midrash Lekach Tov to Gen. 44:18, and Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 93:6.

⁸⁹ Midrash Pesikta Rabbati, *piska* 7:2.

⁹⁰ Tosefta *Berachot* 4:18.

⁹¹ Mechilta d'Rabbi Shimon b. Yohai to Exod. 14:23. Before, Judah withheld telling the spicetraders of Joseph's true identity. This time, however, he does not repeat the mistake of failing to protect his brother. Ibid.

of making a proper confession. According to Philo, Judah has finally learned how to act with prudence and virtue.⁹²

Indeed, it is not just Judah who must do *teshuvah* for his past sins; all of the brothers need to properly atone before a reconciliation can occur. Bereshit Rabbah credits all of the brothers with making such expiation:

And they said, 'We, your servants, are twelve brothers...and one is not' (Gen. 42:13). 'Then where is he?' he demanded. 'We sold him,' they replied. 'For how much?' 'For five *selas*,' was their answer. 'Now if one were to say to you, "Give me five *selas* and I will restore him to you," would you do so?' he asked. 'Yes,' they answered. 'And if he demanded, "Give me twice as much," would you do so?' 'Yes.' 'But if he said to you, "No matter how much you give, I will not restore him to you," what would you do?' 'We have indeed come down with that purpose – to be killed or to kill.'⁹³

In this Midrash, Joseph is obviously testing his brothers. However, he hears much more than he ever expected to hear. Not only is Judah willing to stand in the place of Benjamin, but now all of the brothers bear their souls. They are all prepared to make a tremendous sacrifice for what they have done in the past.

The brothers are willing to die for Joseph if that is what it will take to bring him back safely to their father, Jacob. Once again, the theme of "restoring" is dramatically played out. Judah's speech to Jacob is sincere because it contains the crucial element of "responding" – he is willing to pay the ultimate sacrifice to restore things to the way they were before the spicetraders bought Joseph. The brother's courage is even more significant given that they are making this statement before the second most powerful man in Egypt.

⁹² Nahum N. Glatzer, ed. *Philo Judaeus: The Essential Philo* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971): 62-3.

⁹³ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 91:7.

B. **Judah Becomes a Model to Emulate.**

The Rabbis look to Judah as a character that we should all try to emulate. He is flawed, yet capable of redemption. He can be weak, yet shows that he can be a courageous leader. Perhaps most importantly, he can be selfish and void of spirituality, yet accepts the presence of God at the crucial moment when he is most needed by his family.

Judah's humanness touches a chord in all of us. Despite his shortcomings, he becomes a hero of sorts in the rabbinic tradition. Judah's *teshuvah* is sincere and forthright, which enhances his stature in the eyes of the Rabbis. He is the "everyday man," someone with whom all of us can associate. He even gives practical advice that is plain, clear and understandable. On his deathbed, a midrash explains that he warned his sons against wine, women and avarice.⁹⁴

The Midrashic tradition credits Judah with being the ultimate leader. The Psalmist eloquently sings,

For the leader, with instrumental music.

A psalm of Asaph, a song.

God has made Himself known in Judah,

His name is great in Israel.⁹⁵

For the Rabbis, it is only through Judah's *teshuvah*, and the wisdom that he has gained through experience, that allows him to become such a great leader.

⁹⁴ Otto Eissfeldt. *The Old Testament, an Introduction: Including the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and also the Works of Similar Type from Qumran*. Peter R. Ackroyd, trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1965): 632.

⁹⁵ Psalms 76:1-2.

Midrash Psalms connects the last two lines of this song (Psalm 76:2) with another Psalm that speaks of the connection between God and Judah. Psalm 114:2 states, "Judah became God's holy one; Israel, His dominion." The Midrash credits the tribe of Judah with leading the people across the Red Sea after leaving Egypt:

R. Judah taught in the name of R. Ilai: When the children of Israel stood at the Sea, they stayed there, disputing one with the other. One said, 'Must I go down first into the sea?' Meanwhile, Nahshon, son of Amminadab [head of the tribe of Judah], jumped into the waves of the sea, and it came over him.⁹⁶

Judah has become a symbol of leadership and courage. The jump into the Red Sea is not just a physical act of leadership, it is also a spiritual act. Judah became the prototype for the willingness to submit to God's guiding love. By jumping first into the Red Sea, Judah hallowed the name of God.⁹⁷ As the Psalmist declares, God has become known to Judah, and Judah has accepted God's presence by being the first to jump into the sea. Midrash Psalms reinterprets the verse to mean that by jumping into the sea and sanctifying God's name, Israel became his (Judah's) dominion!

Judah's confession and *teshuvah* is what allows him later to have the courage to stand up to Joseph in Egypt. Judah has become a daring character, modest yet courageous, able to speak forcefully and without impudence.⁹⁸ Just as he inspires us to look at our own faults and admit our own wrongdoings, the midrashim describe the many ways in which Judah inspired others around him to act righteously. For example, Judah inspired his brother Reuben to confess to the sin of sleeping with his father's

⁹⁶ Midrash Psalms 76:1. Elsewhere, it says, "R. Tarfon then asked the disciples, 'If what you say is true, then by virtue of what good deed did the tribe of Judah merit the kingship?' They answered, 'It was because the tribe of Judah leaped [first] into the waves of the sea.'" Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ C.D. Yonge, trans. *The Works of Philo Judaeus, the Contemporary of Josephus*. London: Covent Garden (1854): Part II, 499.

maidservants.⁹⁹ Furthermore, the Midrash states that Judah's character was so resolute, that when he stood up to Joseph in the climactic scene in Genesis 44, he inspired Hushim, the son of Dan, to run to his side and help him in confront Joseph.¹⁰⁰

Perhaps the most eloquent summary of what has become of Judah came from the lips of his own father, Jacob. On his deathbed, Jacob gave Judah the following blessing:

You, O Judah, your brothers will praise;

Your hand will be on the nape of your foes;

Your father's sons will bow low to you.

Judah is a lion's whelp;

On prey, my son, have you grown.

He crouches, lies down like a lion,

Like the king of beasts.

Who dare awaken him?

The scepter shall not depart from Judah,

Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet;

So that tribute shall come to him,

And the homage of peoples be his.¹⁰¹

Jacob recognizes the person Judah has become. Abarbanel explains the purpose of Jacob's words as follows: "[It is] not meant to be a blessing, nor meant to be a reproach, nor to foretell the future... but to say whether or not they were worthy of having

⁹⁹ Sifre Devarim, *piska* 248.

¹⁰⁰ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 93:7. Ironically, according to tradition, Hushim is hard of hearing. See T.B. *Sotah* 13a. Judah's anger at Joseph was so loud that even Hushim was able to hear him.

¹⁰¹ Gen. 49:8-10.

sovereignty and dominion."¹⁰² Through his ability to do *teshuvah*, Judah is a recognized leader among all of his brothers, who represent the heads of their respective tribes. He has become powerful like a king, but only because he has learned how to be merciful. His brothers will bow low to him, but only because he has taught them how to be righteous. Finally, he is deserving of tribute, but only because he has earned it by confessing his sins and by turning to God.

Judah's strength and power become a symbol of Israel's ultimate redemption. Like Judah, the Rabbis believe that the people of Israel will be able to defeat their own enemies in the Diaspora.¹⁰³ Once the anointed one comes, he will be like Judah, striking fear in those who persecute him, causing nations to quake, and casting out evil from the world.¹⁰⁴ Taking it one step further, Judah becomes the symbol of what is needed to usher in the messianic kingdom itself. Like Judah, Israel must first be punished for turning away from God. According to the Rabbis, only then will God restore Israel's stature as a leader among the nations.¹⁰⁵ Judah has become the harbinger of the Messianic Kingdom of God.

¹⁰² Abarbanel to Gen. 49:1-2.

¹⁰³ Charles, *The Book of Jubilees*, 188.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Nickelsburg, George. "For the Society of Biblical Literature on its One-Hundredth Anniversary," publ. in, *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism: Profiles and Paradigms*, Collins and Nickelsburg, eds. (Ann Arbor, MI.: Scholars Press, 1980): 95.

Chapter 6

***Vayiggash:* Judah draws near to Joseph**

A. The Brothers Reconcile

At long last, the brothers reconcile in Genesis 44. Both the Biblical text and the midrashim stress the importance of the spiritual journey that Judah, Joseph, and the entire family must undergo before a reunion can take place.

Joseph has been in Egypt for some time, where he has developed into an effective administrator. Similarly, Judah has matured into an effective leader in his own right. Age, experience, and most importantly, the presence of God in their lives, has lead them to a place where they are able to somehow learn to love each other again.

The Biblical narrative places much emphasis on Judah's role at the moment of reconciliation. It is his words that prompt Joseph to reveal his identity, forgive his brothers, and move his family to Egypt under Joseph's protection. Judah speaks to Joseph forcefully and without any interruption. The reader senses that Joseph is indeed eager to reconcile, but only if he has evidence that the brothers have changed. Abarbanel comments that Joseph needed to be convinced of three things: first, that the brothers were devoted to Jacob; second, that they loved Benjamin; and third, that they regretted their crime against Joseph.¹⁰⁶ Although Joseph has gotten an indication through his prior meetings with his brothers that these three things have occurred, he still needs to hear words of regret from them.

Joseph has put the brothers through a series of tests to see if they have changed, all the while desperately hoping that they have. In Joseph's first encounter with his brothers, he is threatening and accusatory towards them. When they leave, however, he weeps (Gen. 42:23-24). Upon meeting them a second time, he tests their honesty by placing a silver goblet in Benjamin's sack. Yet, at the same time, he is courteous and

¹⁰⁶ Abarbanel to Gen. 42:7.

kind to them (Gen. 43:16). Lastly, Joseph even honors his brothers at a banquet.

However, he showers Benjamin with praise and honor to see if the brothers still harbor anger and jealousy toward the sons of Rachel (Gen. 43:31-34).¹⁰⁷

All of these tests are not enough for Joseph. He needs to hear the brothers actually speak words of regret. He needs to hear an apology. The eighteen verses that Judah speaks to Joseph prompts us to ask certain questions about the reconciliation. What did Judah say that was so persuasive? How did Judah draw near (*vayiggash*) to Joseph? How did Judah respond to Joseph's demands and accusations? The Rabbis were also interested in these questions, and so it is not surprising to see that there is much midrashic analysis of Judah's speech.

Judah's words were magical. The Midrash likens them to Proverbs 25:11, "Like apples of gold in silver showcases is a phrase well turned."¹⁰⁸ Judah's words seemed to fit perfectly with his intended goal. He seems to pick just the right things to say, omitting that which may incur Joseph's anger, while including that which will stir Joseph's heart to passion.

Judah's speech can be broken down into one of three categories: communication, action, and emotion.¹⁰⁹ Most of the midrashim analyzing Judah's speech fit into one of these three categories. By looking at these sources, we can better understand what is meant to "draw near" to someone.

¹⁰⁷ Mark A. O'Brien. "The Contribution of Judah's Speech," 429-47.

¹⁰⁸ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 93.4.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 85:3. According to this midrash, the Bible praises Judah for his *communication* (he spoke up for Joseph in Genesis 37:26), for his *actions* (he threw himself before Joseph in Genesis 44:14), and for his *emotion* (he "drew near" to Joseph in Genesis 44:18). Ibid.

1. Judah the Communicator

The power of communication in Genesis 44:18-34 speaks for itself. Joseph already has tested the brothers on a number of occasions. But obviously this is not enough. He needs to hear what they have to say. Words of regret and remorse are just as important as making retribution.

Perhaps this is why Judah opens his speech with, "Please, my lord, let your servant appeal to my lord..." (Gen. 44:18). *Davar* (appeal) can also mean "word." According to the Midrash, with another vocalization, it can also mean "a plague" (*dever*).¹¹⁰ While Judah is asking for permission to speak to Joseph, he is also letting Joseph know the power of the words that he is about to utter. His words are meant to effect a particular response in Joseph. Joseph knows that if he stubbornly refuses Judah's wishes, only harm will come to him, as he will be beset with plagues. As the Midrash states, "Take heed [to the *davar* – word], lest you will be smitten with leprosy [*dever* – plague]."¹¹¹

If a plague will not work, Judah will use his words to communicate a legal argument to Joseph. Commenting on the word *vayiggash*, the Rabbis posit that, "[Judah argued], 'In our law, it is written, "He shall make restitution. If he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft" (Ex. 22:2). But he [Benjamin] has the means to make restitution.'"¹¹² Legally, Joseph can only enslave Benjamin for the theft of the goblet if he cannot make restitution. However, there can be restitution because Joseph can substitute Judah in the place of Benjamin.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 93:6.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

Judah also is not afraid to use his words to attack Joseph morally. He does not hold back in letting Joseph know that what he is about to do is not only illegal, but immoral as well. In Judah's opening line, he says to Joseph, "Please (*Bi*), my lord, do not get angry with your servant" (Gen. 44:18). The Midrash plays with the phrase, "Please my lord." *Bi* can be an entreaty, such as when Judah says "please" before fully addressing Joseph: "Please, my lord, let your servant appeal to my lord" (Gen. 44:18). However, if an *aleph* is added to the end, so that it becomes *biyah*, it means "an injustice."¹¹³ Judah is really communicating to Joseph that what he is about to do is a moral injustice. In essence, he is calling Joseph a liar. Joseph had said earlier that Benjamin should be brought to him, so that Joseph could "set eyes on him" (Gen. 44:21). Joseph is going against his own word, for he is about to do much more than just set eyes on his youngest brother.¹¹⁴

Our tradition relates that Judah's words of supplication, *bi adoni* ("please, my lord"), are so important because they prepare Joseph for hearing something that he will not like. Judah is about to speak words that will cast Joseph in a negative light. He will be calling Joseph a liar. Furthermore, Judah will be letting Joseph know that he is the cause of all of the misfortune that is about to beset the house of Jacob.¹¹⁵ Judah does not hold anything back. He informs Joseph that what he is about to say may hurt and offend Joseph, but it must be said nevertheless.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. This Midrash also states that Joseph actually wanted to sleep with his younger brother, Benjamin. Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Sforno to Gen. 44:18.

Judah's communication during these eighteen verses is a display of his wisdom.¹¹⁶

His powerful words are relevant and to the point.¹¹⁷ Most importantly, they bring about their intended result. At the end of the speech, the Bible tells us that Joseph can no longer contain himself. He sobs uncontrollably, and then tells the brothers who he really is (Gen. 45:1-3).

2. *Judah Takes Action*

One can also read *vayiggash* to mean that Judah drew near in a physical sense to Joseph. The Rabbis tell us that Judah, summoning up all of his courage, did just that. It is important to realize, however, that Judah would not have been able to physically confront Joseph if he was still the person he was when he sold Joseph to the spicetraders. Our tradition credits Judah with doing all that he can to save Benjamin, even if it means threatening the Vizier of Egypt.

According to the midrashim, when Judah "drew near" to Joseph, he was displaying fierce anger. The Rabbis state, "When Judah was filled with anger, the hairs on his chest would pierce right through his clothes and force their way out, and he would put iron bars into his mouth and bring them out ground to powder."¹¹⁸ Judah is not content with mere communication, using simply words to appeal to Joseph's sensibilities. He is prepared to fight for Benjamin, his brothers, and his father. Another midrash explains,

'Then Judah drew near to him.' The same thing applies [to the following verse]: 'As iron sharpens iron...' (Prov. 27:17). Just as one finds that he cannot stand before iron since it will cause his death, so, too, Joseph could not stand alone

¹¹⁶ Avot deRabbi Natan Beshtei Nusahot, *piska* 40.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 93:6.

before the iron of Judah. Thus it says, '...so a man sharpens the wit of his friend' (*Ibid*). Just as Joseph was a king.... so, too, Judah was a king, as Scripture says, "Though Judah became more powerful than his brothers and a leader came from him..." (I Chron. 5:2). In this way Judah and Joseph were stirred up to fight one against the other.¹¹⁹

This midrash explains that in the course of Judah being prepared to fight his brother, he became Joseph's equal. As a consequence, they both will be the progenitors of kingly lines.

Why do the Rabbis interpret *vayiggash* to mean that Judah was prepared to fight with Joseph? In some instances, it seems, fighting is necessary. Perhaps this is yet another test set forth by Joseph, to see how far Judah is willing to go to protect Benjamin. He needed to know what actions Judah was willing to take. What he discovered is that Judah was prepared even to attack the Vizier of Egypt. One midrash explains that when Judah "drew near" to Joseph, he was so close to him that no air could come between them!¹²⁰

The most important action, however, that Judah took was to stand in Benjamin's place. According to the midrashim, *vayiggash* means not only that Judah prepared himself to do battle, but he also spiritually drew near to Joseph. Judah did this by telling Joseph that he was willing to take Benjamin's place, if only Joseph would agree to send Benjamin back to be with his father. In this regard, Bereshit Rabbah explains,

'Then Judah came near [*vayiggash*] to him....' It is written, 'My son, if you have become surety for your neighbor . . . , then you are caught by the words of your mouth. Do this now, my son, to extricate yourself, [for you have come into the power of your fellow. Go grovel, and badger your fellow]' (Prov. 6:1).¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Midrash Bereshit Rabbati to Gen. 44:18.

¹²⁰ Aggadat Bereshit 76:4, quoting Job 41:8 ("One scale touches the other; not even a breath can enter between them").

¹²¹ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 93:1.

One can imagine Judah actually falling down in the dust before Joseph's feet. He has become Benjamin's surety, and he is willing to make this sacrifice on Benjamin's behalf, if only Joseph will allow it. The Rabbis are making the point that despite all of the effective communication skills displayed by Judah in his speech, it is his actions that are equally as important. Although Judah's speech is forceful and demanding, there is an element of pleading by Judah. He must beg a little to save Benjamin from slavery and offer himself in Benjamin's place.

Other midrashim interpret *vayiggash* differently. Instead of stating that Judah is drawing near to do battle with Joseph, another tradition explains that Judah is drawing near to mollify Joseph. In fact, some midrashim even relate both traditions at the same time.¹²² This seems on the surface to be a contradiction. However, by giving *vayiggash* different, even opposite meanings, the Rabbis underscore the power of action. It is not so much what Judah is proposing that he do in response to Joseph's demand that Benjamin remain in Egypt that is so important. The main thing is that Judah is prepared to do almost anything. His actions show that Judah has become accountable. He is not just willing to sit by idly and watch Benjamin be taken, as he did when Joseph was sold into slavery years earlier.

3. *Judah Appeals to Emotion*

Judah is sincere, speaking with passion and emotion. His words are meant to elicit an immediate response from Joseph.

Joseph, for his part, is obviously moved by Judah's words. The Bible tells us that at the end of Judah's speech, "Joseph could no longer control himself..." (Gen. 45:1).

¹²² Ibid., 93:6.

Judah ironically speaks passionately about his father. The Midrash relates, "As soon as he mentioned his father's grief, he [Joseph] could not contain himself, yet he summoned up his strength and continued to sit."¹²³ One can only imagine what affect these words had on Joseph, since Jacob is his father, too. Judah is appealing to Joseph's sense of sympathy.

According to the Rabbis, when Judah drew near (*vayiggash*) to Joseph, he came close to pray with him. The Bible states, "When it was time to present the [sacrifice of the] meal offering, the prophet Elijah came forward (*vayiggash*) ..." (I Kings 18:36). The Rabbis attribute the same action to Judah when he approached Joseph.¹²⁴ Prayer is the ultimate display of emotion. Moreover, after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, prayer became a substitute for the priestly sacrifices. Judah is appealing to the presence of God at this moment, imploring Joseph to recognize that this is what God wants.

Judah's display of emotion causes Joseph, in turn, to display his own emotions.

Bereshit Rabbah states in this regard.

'Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out' (Prov. 20:5). This may be compared to a deep well full of cold and excellent water, yet none could drink of it. Then came one who tied cord to cord and threat to thread, drew up its water and drank, whereupon all drew water in this manner and drank it. In the same way Judah did not cease from answering Joseph word for word until he penetrated to his very heart. Therefore, 'Then Judah came near [*vayiggash*] to him' (Gen. 44:18).¹²⁵

Judah uses his words wisely. He is discerning, connecting Joseph's emotions to every sentence he utters. Eventually, he is able to penetrate the hard, outer shell that Joseph displayed.

¹²³ Ibid., 93:8.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 93:6.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 93:4; Midrash Lekach Tov to Gen. 44:18.

B. The Rabbis and Family Strife

The Rabbis recognize that family strife can be a frequent occurrence. Throughout Genesis, there are numerous instances of such friction: Abraham banishing Hagar and Ishmael; Isaac and his brother; and Jacob and Esau. In the Joseph narrative, the tension between the siblings is palpable. The Biblical text demands that we ask ourselves what is necessary in order to bring an end to such family conflict.

The Midrash relates that the world is held together by three things. The last of these three things is when one brings peace between a man and his fellow.¹²⁶ Judah deserves much of the credit for bringing the peace between the brothers and Joseph. However, it is clear that all of the members of Jacob's house had a role in the reconciliation, including Joseph, Jacob and Benjamin.

Bereshit Rabbah tells of a tradition whereby Joseph asks Benjamin if he has a family. When Benjamin answers him, he asks Benjamin to tell him the names of his children. Benjamin answers,

Bela signifies that he [my brother] was swallowed up (*nit-bala*) from me; Becher, that he was a firstborn (*bachor*); Ashbel, that he was taken away captive (*nishbah*) from me; Gera, that he became a stranger (*ger*) in a foreign country; Naaman, that his actions were seemly and pleasant (*na'im*); Ehi, that he indeed was my brother (*achi*); Rosh, that he was my superior (*rosh*); Muppin, that he was exceedingly handsome (*yafeh ad me'od*) in all circumstances; Huppim, that I did not see his marriage canopy (*chuppah*) and he did not see mine; and Ard, that he was like a rosebud (*v'ard*).¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Yalkut Shimoni, vol. 1, *remez* 137.

¹²⁷ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 93:7.

Like his brother Judah, Benjamin also appeals to Joseph's emotional side. Benjamin caused Joseph's heart to yearn for his younger brother.¹²⁸ He remembers Joseph and names his children after the many aspects of Joseph's life.

The Rabbis address the issue of family reconciliation directly. The midrashim tell us exactly what is needed to bring families back together. A number of midrashim sum up all of the traditions relating to the Joseph narrative (and the midrashim focusing on *vayiggash*). According to these traditions, Judah's speech encompassed all of the following: *piyyus* (reconciliation), *tefillah* (prayer), *milchamah* (aggression), *shalom* (peace), *tanchumin* (comfort); *korban* (sacrifice); *nizifah* (anger); *b'dikah* (testing); *niggash* (drawing near) and *ahavah* (love).¹²⁹ Some of these elements are contradictory, such as aggression and comfort, anger and love, and even peace and testing. All of these factors, however, must play themselves out before family strife can be alleviated.

Jacob's family has been on a long journey, one that has taken over two decades to finally come to some kind of resolution. During that period, there have been times when all of the above emotions have been displayed. Without just one of them, there could be no final scene in which Joseph breaks down, cries, and reveals who he truly is. No one factor is more important than any other.

The only element that appears to be missing from this list, however, is God. Perhaps this is because the Rabbis attribute God to the presence that drives each of these elements.¹³⁰ According to the Rabbis, the only reason Joseph stayed his sword when Judah confronted him was because of the presence of God.¹³¹ Joseph recognized that

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., and Midrash HaGadol to Gen. 44:18. See also, Midrash Lekach Tov to Gen. 44:18.

¹³⁰ See Chapter 7, below.

¹³¹ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 93:7.

God was with Judah, driving him to display his wisdom, passion, and love for his family.

The starting point, then, is God. Everything else, including the elements necessary to end family discord, flows from God's presence.

Chapter 7

Reconciliation Occurs Only with God's Presence Within Us

A. God and Joseph

Ultimately, the Rabbis recognize that the key source of the reconciliation between the brothers is God. Even in those sections of Genesis where God is rarely, if ever, mentioned, God's presence is always being felt. As the midrashim show us, all of the qualities acquired by the characters in the Joseph narrative were gained through having God in their lives. Moreover, Torah becomes the vehicle by which we are able to keep God's presence within us. By studying God's Bible, observing mitzvot, and hearkening to the lessons of the Rabbis, we are able to draw closer to one another, just like Judah and Joseph did.

The midrashim consistently agree that God was the driving force behind the Joseph narrative. As early as the Book of Jubilees, God was given credit for Joseph's maturation.¹³² Bereshit Rabbah credits Joseph with having God on his lips when he refused Potiphar's wife:

He told her, 'It is the practice of the Holy One, blessed be He, to choose the beloved of my father's house for a burnt-offering, as He called upon Abraham: "Take now your son, your only son"' (Gen. 22:2).¹³³

Joseph refuses Potiphar's wife out of his love for God. Joseph recognizes that in a way, he also has become God's "chosen one." Joseph will be called upon to be a leader among the Jewish people, much in the same way his ancestors were also leaders.

The Rabbis explain that one can only overcome sin by having God in your life. According to the rabbinic tradition, Joseph uses God's presence as his strength in overcoming the daily advances of Potiphar's wife.¹³⁴ Through God's presence, Joseph is

¹³² See Charles, *The Book of Jubilees*, 223.

¹³³ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 87:5

¹³⁴ Pesikta d'Rav Kahana, *piska* 3:2.

able to subdue his evil inclination and is likened to a man who "can emerge from a dungeon to become king" (Eccl. 4:14).¹³⁵

There are many aspects of God's presence that can prevent a person from giving into his or her evil inclination. The Rabbis make clear, however, that it is God's commandments, or God's Torah, that is the most important. According to Numbers Rabbah, when Potiphar's wife was constantly "coaxing" (*k'dibarah*) Joseph, Joseph was reminded of God's "word," or "commandment" (*davar*) (Gen. 39:10).¹³⁶ Even when Joseph was under Pharaoh's rule and he owed his allegiance to Pharaoh, Joseph never forgot God and God's Torah.¹³⁷

For Joseph, the ultimate ruler was always God, and for the Rabbis, Joseph's salvation came through Torah, the ultimate of God's teachings.¹³⁸ Song of Songs Rabbah states:

"The song of songs (Song of Songs 1:1)." This is in line with what Scripture said through Solomon: "Do you see a man who is diligent in his business? He will stand before kings, he will not stand before mean men" (Prov. 22:29). "He will stand before kings." This refers to the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.¹³⁹

Joseph is diligent by refusing Potiphar's wife. He was able to resist temptation through God's presence. For us, our "diligence" comes through studying Torah. By learning about what God expects of us through Torah, we, too, are able to overcome sin and "stand before kings."

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Midrash Numbers Rabbah 14:6.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Midrash Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah 1:1.

¹³⁹ Ibid., see also Midrash Psalms 119:12.

B. God and Judah

God is also the driving force behind Judah's journey. When Jacob protests against sending Benjamin back to Egypt with his brothers to get food, Judah responds, "Send the boy in my care, and let us be on our way, that we may live (*nich'yeh*) and not die..." (Gen. 43:8). Commenting on the word *nich'yeh* (that we may live), Rashi explains that God gave Judah the courage to say these words.¹⁴⁰ Through God, therefore, Judah was able to convince Jacob that, despite his fears, Judah would at least ensure that Jacob's family would continue to live.

Judah's ability to do *teshuvah* is also attributed to God's presence. The Midrash teaches us that when Judah was finally able to admit that Tamar was more righteous than he, God was behind Judah's confession.¹⁴¹ This is the meaning of the verse in Psalms that states, "By Judah is God known" (Ps. 86:2).¹⁴² Through Judah's confession, Judah was able to feel God's presence.

Moreover, Judah's speech before Joseph was a product of God's influence in Judah's life. Noticeably absent from Judah's sixteen verse speech to Joseph is any mention of God (Gen. 44:18-34). The Rabbis, however, are quick to point out that God is the force driving Judah to speak so boldly to Joseph. For example, the Rabbis expound upon Judah's speech as follows:

The covenant the Holy One made with the fathers, we break, and not only this but also the agreement that we made between us. Did you not say, "If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here...and bring your youngest brother to me?" (Gen. 42:19-20) And our father did not want it, so we also made an agreement with him, as it is stated, "I myself will be surety for him (Gen. 43:9). And you say, "Only the one in whose possession the cup was found shall be my slave." If this be so, where is the covenant that the Holy One agreed to in His Torah, as it is

¹⁴⁰ Rashi to Gen. 43:8.

¹⁴¹ Midrash Numbers Rabbah 13:4.

¹⁴² Ibid.

written, "But as for your brothers the Israelites, no one shall rule over his brother with harshness (Lev. 25:46)," and "You shall not make them serve as slaves (Ibid. v. 39)."¹⁴³

Judah is reminding Joseph that he is breaking God's law by going back on his word.

Joseph had promised not to harm any of the brothers if they could prove that they were

honest men. Judah had promised to be surety for Benjamin, but now Joseph refuses

Judah's attempt at making restitution. Judah is demanding that Joseph adhere to God's

Torah, and obey the mandates in Leviticus. According to this midrash, then, it is by

quoting Torah that Judah was able to convince Joseph not to enslave Benjamin.

Judah, like Joseph, became more aware of God in his life as he matured. The Rabbis send a strong message that only through a sense of God's presence is one able to overcome his or her shortcomings and make peace with another human being.

C. God, Torah and the People of Israel

For the Rabbis, the Joseph narrative is meant to send us a strong message. Each of us is capable of gaining wisdom and insight into ourselves, just as Joseph and Judah did. The starting point of gaining such wisdom, however, is through a relationship with God.¹⁴⁴ It is only through a personal relationship with God that we are capable of living a spiritual life, and escaping a life that is often filled with evil.¹⁴⁵

The Rabbis viewed the Joseph narrative through the lenses of their own times.

For the persecuted Jews of the Diaspora, Joseph and Judah were deserving of being tested

¹⁴³ Aggadat Bereshit 76:1.

¹⁴⁴ De Lange, *Apocrypha* 22-23.

¹⁴⁵ See Rashi to Gen. 43:8.

by God. They, like the people of Israel, are righteous and strong, able to withstand the trials and tribulations that God places upon them.¹⁴⁶

The other nations of the world, however, are not capable of surviving this test. Indeed, some midrashim foretell of a day when Israel will be the superior nation, and God will cause the nations of the world to be subject to her.¹⁴⁷ For example, when Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream, Pharaoh states, "Can we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?" (Gen. 41:38) Bereshit Rabbah proposes that Pharaoh's statement is a foreshadowing of Song of Song's 6:9, which says, "Only one is my dove...Queens and concubines praise her!" According to the Rabbis, the "Queens," are the powerful nations of the world, such as Egypt in Joseph's days.¹⁴⁸ Through obeying God's commandments, one day Israel will rule over those powerful nations. Furthermore, the Rabbis believed that the ones who will be praised are going to be the Jewish people. Just as Pharaoh is seen in Genesis 41:38 praising Joseph, the nations of the world will also bow down before the leader of Israel and will praise her.¹⁴⁹

As the Joseph narrative comes to a conclusion, Jacob's family makes its way down to Egypt. On the way, the Bible says, "[Jacob] sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph, to point the way before him to Goshen" (Gen. 46:28). Why did Jacob send Judah ahead, since the brothers had already twice been down to Egypt and back?. What, then, did Judah need to accomplish in order to prepare the way for Jacob?

¹⁴⁶ Midrash Sechel Tov to Gen. 39:7, and Midrash Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah 16:2.

¹⁴⁷ Midrash Aggadat Bereshit 76, Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 40:1, and Midrash Lekach Tov to Gen. 44:24.

¹⁴⁸ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 40:1.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

The Midrash provides the answer: Judah went to prepare a house of study for the brothers and their families.¹⁵⁰ Torah became the purpose of the journey, now that the family had been brought back together. The word "Torah" actually means "to guide" or "to instruct." The same root is used in the Biblical verse: "He had sent Judah...to point the way (*l'horot*)..." (Gen. 46:28). Furthermore, *l'horot* is written without a *vav* after the *resh*, so that what is left is *hay-vav-resh-taf*. These are the same four letters that are used to spell "Torah," just rearranged. According to the Rabbis, Judah's leadership is based on Torah study. He learns, and grows, from God's Torah.

¹⁵⁰ Rashi to Gen. 46:28.

Chapter 8

Thematic Overview: The Rabbis' Major Perspectives

The Joseph narrative is a story of a family being torn apart and then coming back together again after many years of soul-searching and maturation. So much trauma unfolds at the beginning of the cycle, it is hard to imagine that Jacob's family will ever be able to live together peacefully.

Joseph, the favorite of his father, is sold into slavery by his brothers. Not caring what effect this has on their father, the brothers inform Jacob that a beast killed Joseph. At one point, Judah separates from his brothers, and seemingly has no interest in being a part of the family again. For his part, Joseph seems content with his newly acquired Egyptian identity. He rises to become second in command of the most powerful country in the world, and apparently never mentions to anyone his past life in Canaan.

A. Joseph's Development

The Biblical reader, however, knows how the story ends. Joseph is able to forgive his brothers, and Jacob and his family live the rest of their lives peaceably in Egypt. For the reader, multiple questions seem to underlie the Biblical story. The Bible forces us to ask how such a transformation occurred. The Rabbis tell us that both Joseph and Judah, who proves himself to be the leader of his brothers, go through a radical change of character as they grow older. As they experience the travails and complexities of life, they learn valuable lessons. Through God's guiding presence, they are capable of learning forgiveness, reconciliation, and love.

Joseph is seen as a paradigm of virtue, reason and wisdom. He is a natural leader and the favored son in the eyes of his father. The Rabbis have difficulty criticizing Joseph, since he will one day be the messianic hope for all of the Israelite nation. In the

earliest Jewish writings. Joseph is held up to the world, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, as an exemplar of reason and wisdom. For example, in *The Apocrypha*, Joseph, reflecting upon what his brothers did to him, states, "When I was being sold, I refrained from disclosing my race to the Ishmaelites, that I am the son of Jacob, a great man and a mighty one."¹⁵¹ Joseph's nature is to show temperance and discretion, which allows him to one day become the Vizier of Egypt.

However, a different strand of rabbinic tradition portrays Joseph in a much more negative light. According to this tradition, all human beings, no matter how great and virtuous they may be, are prone to erring. It is not surprising, then, that Joseph is seen as haughty and naïve when relating his dreams to his brothers. Furthermore, when he returns to his father after visiting with his brothers, he gives Jacob "bad reports" about them. Although the Bible is silent as to what these reports were, the Rabbis tell us that Joseph slandered his brothers.¹⁵² As a future leader, Joseph must first understand the importance of patience and discretion.

Joseph eventually matures, as we see in the episode involving Potiphar's wife. In Genesis 39:11, Joseph entered Potiphar's house to take a *chesbon*, or an accounting. This literally means that Joseph went inside to look after his master's financial affairs. However, the Rabbis read it to mean that Joseph entered Potiphar's house to take a *chesbon ha'nefesh*, a personal accounting.¹⁵³ Once Potiphar's wife makes her advances, Joseph suddenly sees the face of his father, Jacob. This causes Joseph not to give in to her demands.¹⁵⁴ Joseph has learned a lesson from his earlier experiences and has begun

¹⁵¹ Hollander, *Joseph as an Ethical Model*, 44.

¹⁵² Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 87:1.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 87:7.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

to mature. Even though he knows he will be thrown out of Potiphar's house and placed in prison, Joseph will not commit a sin before his father's face and, of course, before God. Jacob's face reminds Joseph of the righteousness of his ancestors and, perhaps, the sacred covenant that his people made with God.

Joseph encounters numerous experiences wherein he matures and learns how to be an effective leader. Joseph uses discretion when interpreting Pharaoh's dream. He learns to stand up for himself when he is thrown into prison on account of Potiphar's wife. Yet, throughout these episodes, it is God who is the driving force behind Joseph's maturation process. Joseph's wisdom and leadership are gained through age and experience, but the Rabbis make clear that only by having God's presence within him is Joseph able to acquire those virtues.¹⁵⁵

B. Judah's Development

In contrast to Joseph's early character, the Rabbis are in agreement that Judah had many flaws early in his life. Judah could have saved his brother when Joseph was thrown into the pit, but instead convinced his brothers to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites. In doing this, Philo comments that all Judah did was substitute a lesser evil for a greater evil.¹⁵⁶ According to Josephus, Judah simply wanted to rid himself of any guilt over what would become of Joseph, even though Judah knew that Joseph would probably die.¹⁵⁷ Judah must go through a spiritual transformation before he could emerge as a leader in his own right.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 89:6

¹⁵⁶ Yonge, *The Works of Philo Judaeus*, 456.

¹⁵⁷ Whiston, *The Works of Josephus*, 55.

He does this in the episode with Tamar, his widowed daughter-in-law. Judah is tricked by Tamar into sleeping with her, but only after Judah denies Tamar a husband under Levirate marriage laws. When he learns that Tamar was impregnated by him, he makes a public confessional, "She is more righteous than I" (Gen. 38:26).

The Rabbis seize upon Judah's confession as an example of how Judah has matured. We learn from the Midrash that the letters of Judah's name even means, "to confess."¹⁵⁸ Judah's name summarizes the essence of who Judah has become. Furthermore, Judah, by confessing, becomes a model of leadership for others to follow:

When Reuben saw Judah he also stood and confessed his deed. Who inspired whom? We say that Judah inspired Reuben since he repented for his deed. Scripture says of them, "That which wise men have told and have not withheld from their fathers" (Job 15:18).¹⁵⁹

Through Judah's public confession regarding Tamar, he becomes the model of repentance that inspired Reuben's atonement for his sexual transgression.¹⁶⁰ Judah is becoming a leader in his own right.

Judah's maturation goes beyond just learning to confess. Judah also is able to understand what it means to love someone other than himself. He stands as a guarantor for Benjamin, promising to bring him back or be banished in the world to come.¹⁶¹

More importantly, God's presence has become a part of Judah's life. His maturation is dependant upon the presence of God that transforms him from within. As a result of God's presence, Judah becomes a man possessed with logic and reason.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Midrash Tanhuma Buber, *Vayechi* 9.

¹⁵⁹ Sifre Devarim, *piska* 248.

¹⁶⁰ Hayes, "The Midrashic Career of the Confession," 176.

¹⁶¹ Rashi to Gen. 44:32.

¹⁶² Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 93:6.

Through God's comfort, Judah becomes capable of caring for others, and understands the difference between acting out of "sinfulness" and acting out of "righteousness."¹⁶³

Judah also is finally able to repent for what he did to Joseph years earlier. A major theme of the midrashim is that of *teshuvah*. Judah learns what it means to repent, and it is by performing *teshuvah* that he is able to eventually confront Joseph. For the Rabbis, *teshuvah* means, among other things, responding appropriately to a wrong that has been committed. Rashi, for example, sees Judah and his brothers as taking an active role in searching for their brother Joseph when they enter Egypt.¹⁶⁴ Judah has not forgotten the wrong he committed twenty-two years earlier, and he responds by searching for Joseph. He finally understands the importance of *teshuvah* in reconciling with his younger brother.

Once Judah's repentance is complete, he is able to confront Joseph in Egypt. Judah pleads with Joseph not to take Benjamin as a slave, but Joseph refuses. Suddenly, summoning up all of the courage that is within him, Judah launches into a long speech. He demands that Joseph not take Benjamin, but instead allow him to stand in his brother's stead. He mentions the fate of his father, Jacob, who will not be able to endure learning that Benjamin has been enslaved. Perhaps most importantly, he lets Joseph know that the family has already lost one brother, much to the Judah's eternal regret.

The Rabbis concentrate on the Hebrew word that introduces Judah's speech, *vayiggash* (to draw near). Judah "drew near" to Joseph by communicating with him. Commenting on the word *vayiggash*, the Rabbis state, "[Judah argued], 'In our law, it is written, "He shall make restitution. If he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft'"

¹⁶³ Midrash Lekach Tov to Gen. 44:18.

¹⁶⁴ Rashi to Gen. 42:13.

(Ex. 22:2). But he [Benjamin] has the means to make restitution.”¹⁶⁵ Judah is arguing that Joseph can only enslave Benjamin for the theft of the goblet if he cannot make restitution. However, there is a means of restitution because Joseph can take Judah to replace Benjamin.

Furthermore, *vayiggash* implies action on the part of Judah. According to the midrashim, when Judah “drew near” to Joseph, he was displaying his anger towards Joseph. The Rabbis state, “When Judah was filled with anger, the hairs on his chest would pierce right through his clothes and force their way out, and he would put iron bars into his mouth and bring them out ground to powder.”¹⁶⁶ Judah finally has the courage to make the ultimate sacrifice for his brother, Benjamin. Judah’s expression of anger shows that he was willing to die for Benjamin.

Lastly, the Rabbis understand *vayiggash* to mean that Judah displayed all of his most heartfelt emotions before Joseph. Judah spiritually drew near to Joseph by demanding that he take Benjamin’s place. Perhaps the greatest display of emotion is through prayer, since prayer is what brings us closer to God. Like Elijah, who came forward to offer his sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem, Judah “draws near” to Joseph to offer his prayer to his brother.¹⁶⁷

C. God’s Presence

The reconciliation between the brothers could not have taken place, therefore, without God’s guiding hand. Throughout every step of the maturation of Joseph and Judah, the Rabbis discern God’s presence in the process. Bereshit Rabbah credits Joseph

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 93:6.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

with having God on his lips when he refused Potiphar's wife.¹⁶⁸ Judah's ability to do *teshuvah* is also a result of God's presence. The Midrash explains that when Judah was finally able to admit that Tamar was more righteous than his, God was therefore behind Judah's confession.¹⁶⁹

For many of us today, God's presence is seen through the study of Torah. God no longer speaks to us directly in the way God spoke to the patriarchs of Israel. Instead, Torah study has become the mode of experiencing God's presence in our lives. The Rabbis, too, understood that through the study of Torah, one is capable of feeling God's presence. However, just as Judah had to make a spiritual descent into Egypt to eventually erect a house of study,¹⁷⁰ so must we make a spiritual descent in order to eventually find God. According to the Rabbis, Jacob sent Judah ahead of him on their way down to Egypt to set up a house of study.¹⁷¹ The study of Torah, in other words, eventually became the vehicle for ultimately descending spiritually. By studying Torah, we can learn to feel God's presence in the same way God's presence was felt by Judah and Joseph.

Midrash Bereshit Rabbah describes how reconciliation occurs only when all parties have the presence of God within them. The midrash states:

"And then Judah came near..." (Gen. 44:18). What did Joseph do at that time? He kicked the stone column upon which he was sitting and reduced it to a pile of fragments. Judah was astonished at this and said, "He is as powerful as we are!" Judah seized his sword to draw it from its sheath, but it would not come out, and so he said, "This man must certainly be filled with the presence of God."¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 87:5

¹⁶⁹ Midrash Numbers Rabbah 13:4.

¹⁷⁰ Rashi to Gen. 46:28.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Bereshit Rabbah 93:7.

As we saw from other midrashim, God was the source of Judah's courage, allowing him to angrily confront his brother Joseph. In this midrash, we see that Joseph, too, had the spirit of God within him, which allowed him to display great feats of strength and courage as well. Both Judah and Joseph, then, are filled with God's presence. The anger of the brothers is a metaphor for their passion for God. Their physical strength symbolizes their steadfast commitment to God's Torah. And finally, the staying of Judah's hand can be likened to the wisdom and temperance that Judah has found in his journey of reconnecting with Joseph.

Conclusion

Our rabbinic tradition teaches us much about family discord. In many situations where family strife is prevalent, it is still possible to reconnect with those who are estranged from us. The key, according to the Rabbis, is that everyone must be involved in seeking a resolution to the conflict. To do this, God and God's Torah must be the driving force that compel us to reach out to others. Without God's presence in our lives, and the insights of the traditions which the Rabbis teach, forgiveness, atonement, and love for our fellow human beings simply is not possible.

Even those who are seemingly without fault must accept some of the blame for familial dissension. In the Joseph cycle, we see this attitude in the way Joseph is portrayed throughout the midrashim. Early writers, such as Philo and Josephus, place Joseph high on a pedestal. He is completely blameless for the estrangement that occurs within his family. Joseph represents virtue, tolerance, and discretion, universal traits that permeated Greek thinking. Many Jews flourished under early Greek and Roman rule, and so it was important to portray Joseph as a biblical character who could be an attractive model for everyone, including non-Jews.

Later rabbinic writings, however, adopt a different view of Joseph. For the Rabbis, no one, no matter how righteous they may appear to be, is without some degree of fault. More importantly, everyone must continue to mature and grow spiritually. This attitude shift can be attributed to the increasing persecution that began under Roman rule and continued throughout the centuries, which they saw as the result of their own sinfulness. The Rabbis responded by shifting some of the blame for the dysfunction of the family to Joseph. Joseph's youthfulness becomes a sign of his immaturity. The Rabbis feel that he needs to go through a series of experiences which will enable him to

gain insight and love for his fellow human beings. As a result, Joseph represents the messianic hope that will restore the Kingdom of Israel. His suffering, in their eyes, is a reflection of what has happened to the Jews in the Diaspora. The Rabbis see themselves as Joseph, living under foreign rule and struggling to maintain their Jewishness.

Moreover, Joseph sins, and so he must be punished for his transgressions. The Jews of the Diaspora also felt that they had sinned, but, like Joseph, were capable of once again attaining a lofty status in the world devoid of persecution.

The relevancy today of the rabbinic materials discussed in this thesis cannot be understated. Throughout the centuries, the Rabbis have built a roadmap for reconciliation, based upon the Joseph and Judah narratives. The insights of God's Torah are just as capable of bringing us each closer to one another today as it was in the days of Joseph and throughout the centuries. Joseph's wisdom came not from his personal abilities, but because he was imbued with the spirit of God. Judah's ability to do *teshuvah* came not only from a personal sense of guilt, but also because he finally internalized a sense of God's justice. Like all human qualities of character, these transformations are just as possible for us today as they were in the days of antiquity.

I do not suppose that the Rabbis were arguing that every estranged relationship can be reconciled. Instead, the purpose of the midrashim is to teach us what is necessary for such a reconciliation to occur, if the family members are willing to make it happen. Resentment, jealousy, and anger can be powerful emotions. Without God's presence, they simply cannot be overcome. However, if we choose to do so, we are each capable of overcoming such emotions so that we can reconcile, and even strengthen, some of our own personal relationships. God's presence compels us to try and improve ourselves. If

we sense a greater purpose in life, having a relationship with God will encourage us to constantly try and reach towards our higher selves. We all have the ability to change.

The Bible includes many other stories about family conflict that were not a focus of this study. By reviewing them, we may be able to deepen and extend the themes uncovered in this thesis. This paper did not address, for instance, the relationship between Ishmael and Isaac. Other Biblical narratives that may be pertinent to the subject of family discord certainly include Ishmael and Hagar being banished from Abraham's house, and perhaps Leah and Rachel's relationship. Jacob stealing the birthright and blessing from Esau should lead us to the questions: Is it possible for the two of them to reunite as brothers after having been separated for over twenty years? What parallels do the Rabbis draw between their relationship and the relationship between Judah and Joseph? Even Israel's bond with God in the Bible can be a model for reconciliation. Many times the Israelites stray from God's path, and God often seems to want to abandon the Israelites. However, in the end, both the Israelites and God are always reunited. What brought them back together, and what can we learn from such a reunion?

We can also learn about reconciliation from sources other than just the rabbinic interpretations of the Bible. For example, during my research I discovered that the Christian tradition, with its shared history of the Jewish Bible, also has much to say on the Joseph narrative. A study of the Christian patristic interpretation of these narratives may add a different perspective as to how we can view the possibility of achieving reconciliation in our own relationships. In what way does Christian interpretation of the Joseph cycle differ from the midrashic treatment?

Furthermore, this thesis does not address how the later mystical and Chasidic writings weighed in on the subject. Lastly, from a social-scientific standpoint, it would be worthwhile to see how modern sociological and psychological understandings of relationships impact how we view Biblical narratives of strife and reconciliation.

Nevertheless, the study of the rabbinic midrashim relating to Judah and Joseph was perhaps the most rewarding experience in my career as a rabbinical student. I learned much from delving into the interpretations of our ancestors, parsing out their teachings, and synthesizing them into this thesis. I was able to learn firsthand the relevancy of those teachings for our own lives and our own family dilemmas.

In studying Homer's "The Odyssey," my eighth grade teacher taught that Odysseus's pleasure came not from attaining his ultimate goal, but from the journey itself. He used to say that, "the joy lies in the striving." In other words, it is the process of learning that is much more important than what is ultimately learned. In writing this Rabbinic thesis, I have come to understand and appreciate the truth of this credo.

The secret to studying Midrash is not just learning how a particular Rabbi interpreted a piece of Biblical text, but understanding how the Rabbi arrived at that point. This includes trying to piece together how he was shaped by the events happening in his life. I will be eternally grateful for having had the opportunity to experience this process myself in writing this thesis.

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