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DIRECT DISCOURSE IN THE PENTATEUCH

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Preface

Our biblical text has a tremendous amount of "spoken" word woven throughout the text. Those occurrences shall be discussed in this paper as I attempt to discover the differences in speech patterns according to gender and status. However, there are several occurrences of speech that are not included within the definition of "direct discourse":

The story of the Tower of Babel will not be included in this study, for the participants speak in general to each other. There is no speaker identified, nor is there an antecedent distinguished from among the masses. Anonymous speaking in general (unless the speaker is easily identifiable from a preceding verse) will be omitted.

In general, blessings and curses will be omitted because there is no true opportunity for response to such speech, it is not included in the category of "direct discourse" for the purposes of this study. Such incidences include Jacob's blessings to his children and Balaam's "curse" of the Israelites.

Occasionally characters speak to themselves. There are two ways to determine if a character is speaking without an audience. First, if there is no one present when the speech occurs, or second, if the text explicitly state that he or she said to him or herself. For instance, in Genesis 17:17 Abraham asks *himself* how a child can be borne to a couple their age. These incidents will not be included because there is no true discourse in these type of situations.

When children are named, the text generally uses markers of direct discourse, but the process of naming, like the process of blessing and cursing, requires no response. Therefore, it too will be excluded.

This study will be limited to human to human speech. God will not be included as a character in the paper, with the exception of some of the episodes in which it is unclear if the character speaking or spoken to is a human being or a messenger of God. Animal speech will be excluded from this paper, such as the ubiquitous serpent in the Garden of Eden and the speaking donkey in the story of Balaam and Balak.

All translations of biblical verses are from the New Jewish Publications Society. All Hebrew insertions of biblical text in this work are from the Bar Ilan Responsa Compact Disc, Version 3.1. Bar Ilan created this program using an alternative spelling of God—יְדוּד instead of the customary יְהוָה. All translations of Hebrew texts other than biblical texts are my own.

Chapter One

What is Direct Discourse?

Direct discourse (which will be referred to as dialogue and or biblical speech) may be defined as the appearance of elements of speech (verbs, nouns, particles) in a text that identify a configuration of words as recorded speech. We may regard direct discourse in biblical Hebrew to be present whenever an explicit reference appears external to the actual speech that identifies a voice portrayed as speaking. These markers of direct discourse can appear at any time in a statement (preceding, following, or in the middle of the quotation). However, such a marker will always refer to the direct discourse from a vantage point outside the text, showing that the words in question are spoken by a different voice or from a momentary perspective (such as a writer quoting his or her former words).¹

In biblical narrative, direct discourse is as customary as impersonal narration in indirect speech--and many times it is even more pronounced. Instead of relating the story exclusively by the third-person narrative "telling," there is a strong inclination toward the use of direct speech to present the attitudes, motivations, and emotions of the characters through their own words. Given the reserved nature of biblical writers about describing characters in great detail, direct discourse assumes even greater importance. It is dialogue that provides the dramatic presence of the story and allows for confrontation between the characters. For instance, Abraham expresses his excitement at the arrival of the three men in Genesis 18:2 and hurries to tell his wife Sarah to מהרי שלש סאים קמח סלת לוישי ועשי ענות.

¹ Meier, Samuel A., *Speaking of Speaking*, 1

² Savran, George W., *Telling and Retelling--Quotations in Biblical Narrative*, 12

"Quick, three seahs of choice flour" knead and make cakes! Abraham tells Sarah to hurry and complete her task while speaking in short, excited sentences. Another instance may be observed in the conversation between Lot and God's messengers who come to save him. In Genesis 19:15-22, the reader can feel the frustrations of the messengers as they make every attempt to convince Lot that he and his family are in grave danger:

יבמי השחר עליה ויאמרו המלאכים בלוט לאמר קום את-אשתך
ואת-שתי בנותיך הנמצאות פה-תספד בעיו העיר ויתמהמה ויחזקו
האנשים בידו וביד-אשתו וביד שתי בנותיו בהמלה ידוד עליה
ויצאדו וינחהו מחוץ לעיר וידו כדוציאם אתם החוצה ויאמר
המלט על-נפשך אל-תביט אחריו ואל-תעמד בכל-דרכי ההרה
המלט פה-תספד

As dawn broke, the angels urged Lot on, saying, "Up, take your wife and your two remaining daughters, lest you be swept away because of the iniquity of the city." Still he delayed. "Flee for your life! Do not look behind you, nor stop anywhere in the Plain, flee to the hills, lest you be swept away." (Genesis 19:15-17)

Furthermore, in the continuation of the text, we feel Lot's reluctance and trepidation to leave his home:

ויאמר לוט אלהם אל-נא אדני הנה-נא מצא עבדך חן בעיניך
ותגדל חסדך אשר עשית עמדי להחיות את-נפשי ואנכי לא
אוכל להמלט ההרה פן תדבקני-הרעה ומתי

But Lot said to them, "Oh no, my lord! You have been so gracious to your servant, and have already shown me so much kindness in order to save my life, but I cannot flee to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die." (Genesis 19:18-19)

The narrative authors show their preference for direct discourse by making it prominent in the text. Robert Alter remarks that "attitudes, of course--love, hate, fear,

jealousy, and so forth--can be merely reported in a single appropriate verb because what is involved is in effect a summary of interior experience rather than a narrative realization of it. But when the actual process of contemplating specific possibilities, sorting out feelings, weighing alternatives, making resolutions, is a moment in the narrative event, it is reported as direct discourse.³ When Abraham refused to accept reward for redeeming his nephew Lot, Abraham's reaction was as follows:

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל-מֶלֶךְ סֹדֶם הַרִימְתָּ יָדוֹ אֶל-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ כִּנְה
 שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ אֶב-מַחִיט יַעַד שְׂרוּךְ-נֶגֶד יָאֵב אֶרֶץ מִכַּל-אֲשֶׁר-לָךְ וְלֹא
 תֹאמַר אֲנִי הִעֲשִׂיתִי אֶת-אַבְרָם בְּלִעְדֵּי רַק אֲשֶׁר אָכְלוּ הַנְּעָרִים וַחֲלָק
 הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר הָלַכְוּ אִתִּי עִנִּי אֲשַׁכֵּל וּמִמָּרָא הֵם יִקְחוּ חֶלְקָם

"I swear to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth: I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap of what is yours; you shall not say, 'It is I who made Abram rich.' For me, nothing but what my servants have used up, as for the share of the men who went with me--Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre--let them take their share." (Genesis 14:22-24)

How could a narrator have expressed Abram's passion and commitment to his belief in God more than in this quotation? There is an underlying intensity--the feeling of anger and disdain for the king of Sodom--which communicates his feelings about God.

The relationship between Joseph and his siblings is developed through direct discourse. Joseph's brothers expressed their anger toward him after he relayed his dreams:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אֶחָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם-מִשׁוֹל תִּמְשָׁל בָּנוּ וַיּוֹסֶפוּ
 עוֹד שְׂנֹא אֶתוֹ עַל-חֲלֻמֹּתָיו וְעַל-דְּבָרָיו

"His brothers answered, 'Do you mean to reign over us? Do you mean to rule over us?' And they hated him even more for his talk about his dreams" (Genesis 37:8). Joseph's taunting and

³ Alter, Robert *The Art of Biblical Narrative* 68.

his brothers' reactions are filled with blatant sibling rivalry. Its development here is essential for the reader in order to understand the continuation and conclusion of the story. If the narrator had simply told the reader that the brothers hated Joseph, instead of presenting the reader with the actual feelings from the brothers' mouths, the story would lose its dramatic nature and vibrance.

As we saw in the previous two examples, when a biblical author chooses to give the reader dialogue rather than a third-person description of events, he does not simply present a theoretical synopsis about a given event. Rather, the writer strives to present the event in all its experiential immediacy. Dialogue advances the plot faster than narration, since it does not generally contain rumination — dialogue serves to illuminate the human dimension, revealing personal factors such as motives and intentions, points of view and attitudes, positions and reactions.⁴ One scholar suggests that if the biblical authors had a strong sense of the primacy of language, they would be predisposed to believe that “thought was not fully itself until it was articulated as speech.”⁵

Many scholars believe that the fact that direct discourse is so conspicuous in biblical text indicates that much of the Bible originally existed as oral literature. One who would transmit the text might have done so by playing the roles of the various characters in their own “voices.” Leland Ryken states that “when literature is chiefly spoken rather than written, storytellers or poets naturally have a high regard for uttered speech.”⁶ Therefore, it is not

⁴ Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Ha'itsuv ha'omamut shel hassippur hammiqra*, 157-158.

⁵ Alter 68.

⁶ Leland Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible*, 20.

surprising that these literary writers make frequent use of speech patterns. In biblical text human characters that achieve full fulfillment only in relationship—relationship to God and relationship to the human community.⁷ Direct discourse is the instructive and expressive method for this relationship to develop; the dialogue is the language of confrontation, relationship, and confrontation. Ryken concludes: "It is small wonder, therefore, that biblical literature is full of voices speaking and replying."

The biblical authors wasted few words in narrative texts. There are many times that details appear to be missing or a huge span of a character's life is unchronicled. Therefore, it should not surprise us that dialogue in the bible is concise despite the large place that it occupies in most narratives. Biblical characters express themselves in a succinct style and the number of statements in each speech does not generally exceed two or three. There are, of course, exceptions to this fact, but more often than not this statement holds true. In many instances the dialogue is the lion's share of the story, taking a much larger space than the words of the narrator.⁸ In Genesis 37—the first part of the Joseph narrative—a chapter of 36 verses, there are 18 quotations. Approximately eighty-five percent of Exodus 11 comprises three quotations.

In biblical narrative, one must take into consideration that dialogue is never an accurate reproduction of actual conversation. Biblical dialogue is highly concentrated and stylized, lacking the idle chatter of a well-written novel. Rather, every detail that is conveyed

⁷ Ryken 20

⁸ Ryken 21

⁹ Bar-Efrat 157

has been well calculated and each one has a distinct purpose. In addition, the dialogue is so condensed that frequently details we would like or expect to find are missing, especially when we speak of women's speech and her reply to men's comments, although this is certainly not the only time in which we notice "missing" lines. When Sarah orders Abraham to cast Hagar out of the household, there is no argument. The narrator tells the reader that Abraham was indeed "distressed," yet there was no rebuttal. Abraham simply turns to God for advice, and God counsels him to follow Sarah's wishes. Yet one wonders what Abraham's reaction might have been (Genesis 16:5-6). When Abram tells Sarai to pretend she is his sister instead of his wife, she does not argue. She does not even respond. If we are considering this story as truth—if this conversation between Abram and Sarai indeed did transpire, the chances are that there *were* responses. They were simply never recorded. But if we are considering this story as a piece of literature written by biblical authors with a particular focus in mind as they wrote, Sarah's silence is even more profound. Perhaps her silence speaks more than the authors ever intended.

In the narrative texts, unmarked direct discourse is quite rare. When one does not have these external marking of direct discourse, an elementary perusing of the text might result in erroneous readings. There are indeed sections of text when the absence of direct discourse results in uncertainty about the action. We find a perfect example of this ambiguity in the bloody bridegroom narrative in Exodus 4:24-26. However, in the vast majority of cases when a character in the Torah speaks, the speech is attributed to the speaker.

¹⁰ Bar-Efrat 158

Another issue is that of repetitive direct discourse, which can be defined as a piece of dialogue which is repeated later in a text by the same character, or by another character. This idea of quoting what one heard from another individual is called "quoted direct speech" or "quoted direct discourse." Quoted direct discourse delineates a category of repetition that is a clearly distinguished subcategory of direct discourse. An ordinary quotation is frequently employed to insert allusions, synopses, and oblique references to other words and phrases. However, George Savran postulates that quoted direct speech has a narrower and more specific purpose. "A character speaks certain words in the course of a story, and at a later point in the narrative those words are quoted aloud by the same character or by another, with specific reference to the original locution and the original speaker. The quotation may occur within the same periscope as the original speech, in a later chapter, or in a later book."¹¹ The use of repetition in a text downplays the moment by providing the viewpoint of an earlier time. Repetition of a non-quoted text enhances a text by giving intensity, background, and circumstance, yet it causes the first mention of such a moment to lose its primacy, and the moment of repetition its immediacy. The repetition of dialogue however, produces a somewhat different effect. Savran remarks that "the movement into the past is countered by a new present moment of direct speech that both recalls and reformulates. The result may be a complication of reality due to conflicting versions of an event, but more often it is an affirmation of the original statement that helps the story build consistently in a single direction."¹²

¹¹ Savran 7.

¹² Savran 12.

The reader of biblical texts knows that narrated depictions of the emotional and psychological states of biblical characters are rare. Often, one must interpolate such elements from the external words and deeds of the individual. While dialogue is always an effective indicator of these emotions, Savran postulates that "verifiable" quoted direct speech is of significant value. Why? Whereas the reader has already gathered the essential data the initial time the words were uttered, one may now feel free to focus upon the *speaker* of the quotation rather than the particular of his message. Especially in cases where there is no modification from the initial oration, the quotation can authenticate the reliability of the messenger in the reader's eyes, as in Genesis 38:22 and its initial oration in Genesis 38:21.¹³

וישלח יהודה את-גדרי העזים ביד ויעהו העדלמי לקחת הערבון
מיר האשה ולא מצאה: וישאל את-אנשי מקמה לאמר איך הקדשה
הוא בעינים על-הדרך ויאמרו לא-היתה בזה קדשה: וישב אל-
יהודה ויאמר לא מצאתיה וגם אנשי המקום אמרו לא-היתה בזה
קדשה.

Judah sent the kid by his friend the Adullamite, to redeem the pledge from the woman; but he could not find her. He inquired of the people of that town, "Where is the cult prostitute, the one at Enaim, by the road?" But they said, "There has been no prostitute here." So he returned to Judah and said, "I could not find her; moreover, the townspeople said: 'There has been no prostitute here.'"

On the other hand, the presence of an unverifiable direct quotation poses a fascinating discourse quandary in that they often introduce new knowledge whose accuracy the reader must weigh without the assistance of an earlier locution. This query into a quotation's authenticity is important due to the relatively high proportion of false unverifiable citations.

¹³ Savran 80.

Savran's research shows that out of thirty-seven unverifiable quotations in thirty-two speeches in the Bible, there are ten deliberate lies in seven speeches. By comparison, the majority of the ninety-four verifiable quotations include only two cases of misrepresentation (Genesis 3:1, Exodus 32:24), and still in these citations the quotation maintains some likeness to the original speech. This deviation is the unavoidable outcome when there is an absence of an antecedent with which the unverifiable quotation can be compared. Verifiable quoted direct speech allows for a broad realm of fairly accurate repetitions. However, unverifiable quotations tend to be either true or false with very little shading in-between. "In comparison with the subtlety of a deceptive verifiable quotation like Genesis 3:1, fabricated unverifiable quotations are usually obvious lies."¹⁴

One could argue that all quoted direct speech is unverifiable, since, in both the original speech and the quotation, the reader only has the narrator's presentation of the character's words. But it is still essential for the reader to assess the authenticity of unverifiable quotations within the framework of the story. Most commonly, the narrator will confirm or deny the citation by means of the context. Abimelech's accusation that Sarah deceived him by claiming that she was Abraham's sister with the words "He is my brother" (Genesis 20:5b) is rendered believable by the verifiability of Abraham's analogous quotation in the first half of 20:5 "She is my sister"--as well as by Abraham's own confession.

¹⁴ Savran 105.

Markers of Direct Discourse

What are the signs--the Hebrew markers--that signify direct discourse? The most common and obvious examples are those such as *amr* (אמר), *speak* (דבר), and *u'mor* (ענה).¹⁵ There have been many theories that attempt to differentiate between the verbs אמר and דבר when used before direct discourse. For instance, there are times when אמר and דבר are together in a single passage. Why do these variations occur? To what degree are they meaningful? Rashi attempts to account for the direct discourse appearance of וידבר in Deuteronomy 2:17, for speech before this verse is introduced by the root אמר and not דבר. He states that from the moment when the spies were sent out to bring back reports on the land until this moment in Deuteronomy 2:17, the word וידבר is not used in this section. This teaches us that during the 38 years that the Israelites were out of favor, the Divine Utterance [dibbur] did not converse with him [Moses] intimately, face to face. Therefore, וידבר would connote a greater sense of affection than would ויאמר. Yet, if וידבר marks greater intimacy than is exhibited in ויאמר, why are God's subsequent words, spoken in this restored relationship, marked by ויאמר (Deuteronomy 2:31, 3:2)? Rashi makes no suggestion, and there is no further attempt to clarify the reason why the verbs are inconsistent.¹⁶

Another one of these theories suggests that the text of the Hebrew Bible incorporates material that comes from a variety of chronologically, socially, and geographically distinct

¹⁵ There are other examples that are known, such as "כזה אמר יהוה" (thus said the Lord) or נאום יהוה (oracles of the Lord). However, these signs are generally treated as theological constructs, and normally occur outside of the Pentateuch. Therefore, they are isolated from the issue of direct discourse markings in the Torah.

¹⁶ Meier 141.

loci. Therefore there is the possibility that diachronic and dialectic variations may be preserved.¹⁷ Meier comments:

One of the weaknesses of discourse analysis is that in assuming a three-dimensional page, it neglects the fourth dimension of time. How does one control or modify the theory to accommodate a text that changes through time? This question has not yet been adequately addressed by proponents of discourse analysis, even though it reeks havoc with the entire enterprise. Discourse analysis relies upon the most minute details of a text, often those that are the most susceptible to modification through textual transmission.¹⁸

Yet, what if one believed in the unity of the text? Naturally, the variation in verbal forms must indicate a different interpretation of one part of a text from another. There are those who attempted to view the text as a single entity, taking care to note the differences in these verbs as a marker of sorts. We will look into their hypothesis later in this chapter.

We know that each of the three verbs *אמר*, *דבר*, and *ענה* is a sign to the reader to indicate that speech is occurring. Therefore, the question arises whether the appearance of one of these verbs indicating direct discourse as opposed to the appearance of another is significant. What does it mean when we see *אמר* instead of *דבר* or *ענה*? Modern biblical scholarship contends that the appearance of one of these words marking direct discourse results from a distinct literary tradition, rather than from any semantic differences. Is it possible that while *אמר* might have been the colloquial term for one author, *דבר* might have been utilized in another era of time in which another author might write? And where does *ענה* fit into the general scheme of tradition? Let us now investigate three verbs *אמר*, *דבר*, and *ענה* as markers of direct discourse.

¹⁷ Meier 8.

¹⁸ Meier 17.

אמר

The verb אמר in its most familiar form--ויאמר--is the most common marker of direct discourse in the Northwest Semitic languages (Hebrew, Moabite, Phoenician, Aramaic, and related inscriptions).¹⁹ The appearance of אמר to indicate direct discourse in most biblical literature reveals a well-established tradition, so widespread and common that one must question whether it can ever serve as a "rhetoric pattern, which helps to unify" a text.²⁰

In terms of its role as a marker of direct discourse, אמר stands apart from other verbs that denote speech because it almost always seems to demand direct discourse as its supplement. Furthermore, or it seems to be almost obligatory before direct discourse in narrative prose in some form. The infinitive form of this verb--לאמר--has become archetype as the single most characteristic lexical item in Hebrew which indicates that direct discourse is about to occur.²¹

Occasionally, אמר can be repeated within a quotation in order to reaffirm the identity of the speaker. In other words, the narrator occasionally interrupts a character's speech by inserting a repetitious statement, 'and (s)he said.' For example, in Exodus 3:4-6 the text reads

¹⁹ The verb אמר appears over 4300 times in the MT (apart from the infinitive לאמר). Of those occurrences, 196 (4.5%) do not mark direct discourse. These incidences do not occur in a specific section of the MT, though there is definitely a distinction between one style of Hebrew that prefers to use אמר to mark direct discourse and another style (associated with later biblical Hebrew) where אמר more freely stands without an accompanying direct discourse. Texts associated with later Biblical Hebrew show a higher percentage of אמר unaccompanied by direct discourse than is true of biblical literature in general (Meier 63).

²⁰ Niditch, Susan. *The Symbolic Vision in Classical Hebrew Prose*, 48.

²¹ Meier 59-60.

as follows

וירא ידוד כי סר לראות ויקרא אליו אלהים מתוך הסנה ויאמר
משה משה הנני ויאמר אל-תקרב הלב של-נעליך מעל
הנליך כי המקום אשר אתה עומד עליו אדמת-קדש הוא ויאמר
אנכי אלהי אביך אברהם אלהי יצחק ואלהי יעקב ויסתר
משה פניו כי ירא מהביט אל-האלהים

"When the LORD says that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush. And He said, 'Do not come any closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground. I am.' He said, 'the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'" (Exodus 3:4-6)

There is no apparent reason for the addition of the second "He said" in this text. We know from the previous two verses that the speaker is God. This sort of reaffirmation is not necessarily a helpful reminder as to who is speaking, especially when such a restatement occurs after only one brief sentence has been spoken.²² Why does the narrator interrupt the speech and re-identify the speaker?²³ A variation of this theme may be seen in Exodus 3:14-

15:

ויאמר אלהים אל-משה אחיה אשר אחיה ויאמר כה תאמר לבני
ישראל אחיה שלחני אליכם ויאמר עוד אלהים אל-משה כה-
תאמר אל-בני ישראל ידוד אלהי אבותיכם אברהם אלהי יצחק ואלהי יעקב
שלחני אליכם וזה שמי לעלם וזה זכרי לדור דר

And God said to Moses, "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh" He continued, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, 'Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh sent me to you.'" And God said further to Moses, "Thus shall you speak to the Israelites: The Lord, the God

²² We should also exclude from consideration occasions where the speaker shifts his focus from one addressee to another. In Gen. 43:29, when Joseph asks his brothers about Benjamin and then subsequently addresses Benjamin, the reorientation is sufficient explanation for the quite normal restatement that Joseph speaks again but to a different party. Meier 74.

²³ Meier 74.

of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,
has sent me to you

In this example, the speaker is identified every time a new piece of information is added to the knowledge bank of the reader. Meier postulates that this is a "common feature of biblical and extra-biblical narrative and is not problematic." His concern is with those cases in which a finite form of the verb *אכל* reappears in the midst of speech for no comprehensible reason. At least three general approaches have been taken to explain this curiosity.²⁴

The first explanation is that it might be a necessary resumptive marker in long speeches. However, there are many speeches in which it appears that cannot be considered long, while in speeches which are indeed lengthy, it is nowhere to be found. Consider the short speech made in Numbers 32:2-5:

ויבאו בני-גד ובני ראובן ויאמרו אל-משח ואל-אלעזר הכהן
ואל-נשיאי העדה לאמר: עטרות וזיבן ויעזר וגמרה וחשבון
ואלעלה ושכם ונבו ובען: הארץ אשר חכה ידור לפני עדת
ישראל ארץ מקנה הוא ולעבדיך מקנה: ויאמרו אם-מצאנו חן
בעיניך יתן את-הארץ הזאת לעבדיך לאחזה אל-תעברנו
את-הירדן.

The Reubenites and the Gadites owned cattle in very great numbers. [Noting that the lands of Jazer and Gilead were a region suitable for cattle,] the Gadites and the Reubenites came to Moses, Eleazar the priest, and the chieftains of the community, and said, "Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon--the land that the Lord has conquered for the community of Israel is cattle country, and your servants have cattle. It would be a favor to us," they continued, "if this land were given to your servants as a holding, do not move us across the Jordan."

²⁴ Meier 74.

Milgrom argues for the restatement of "and they said" in Numbers 32:5, since "the verb needs to be repeated because of the length remark beginning in verse 2."²⁵ However, this speech lasts for a mere three verses, while the speech of ten verses given by Moses (Numbers 32:6-15) is not interrupted by such a pause. Since many short speeches have this re-identification and many long speeches do not, this solution is deemed inadequate.²⁶

Secondly, the repetition could be an sign of the juxtaposition of different literary sources. This is quite possible in some of the cases in which the textual evidence indicates that the second introduction of direct discourse (along with the second direct discourse that it introduces) is absent in some manuscripts. One-third of all occurrences of this phenomenon occur in Genesis, and nearly one half of all incidents are in Genesis and Exodus alone. These two books are well-known for their multi-layered compositional history, and it is a reasonable deduction that editorial activity may account for the proliferation of the phenomenon in at least some of these verses.²⁷

The third proposal is to understand the repetition as a literary device that communicates more than mere re-identification of a speaker. There are a few ways in which this proposal can be developed. If we are to utilize the Documentary Hypothesis as a method of exploration, it is possible that whenever *וַיֹּאמֶר* interrupts a text it is a sign of P, as a manifestation of P's short style of "incessant repetition." Or, perhaps, as is suggested by Bar Efrat (supported by the research of Shiloah), the reiteration of *וַיֹּאמֶר* indicates a pause in a

²⁵ Milgrom, Jacob. *JPS Commentary, Numbers*, 268.

²⁶ Meier 75.

²⁷ Meier 76.

speech, with a variety of explanations for the need of such a literary device. His approach is to assume that each repetition is meaningful, hiding a subtle nuance.²⁸ But Meier disagrees. He argues that Shiloah's analysis is largely a midrashic search for any explanation that can make sense of the repetition, and that one may always conjure a reason to account for such a repetition. For instance, if we look at the conversation between Jacob and Laban in Genesis 30, Laban says:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו לָבָן אִם-נָא מִצְאָתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ נְחַשְׁתִּי וַיְבָרֶכְנִי יְהוָה
בְּגִלְלֶךָ. וַיֹּאמֶר נִקְבָה שְׂכָרְךָ עָלַי וְאֶתְנָהּ:

"But Laban said to him, 'If you will indulge me, I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me on your account.' And he continued, 'Name the wages due from me, and I will pay you'" (Genesis 30:27-28). J. P. Fokkelman states that at the beginning of verse 28, the text places וַיֹּאמֶר in the middle of Laban's quotation, which seems rather irritating. But, according to this scholar, this interruption is significant because:

it retards the pace of the confrontation with the following effect: after the pious recognition of Yhwh's blessing Laban's mind works feverishly, thinking, how can I keep Jacob as a servant? I know what, I shall ask him to make a wage-proposal himself! We'll see, I shall certainly find an opening, just like some 14/7 years ago.²⁹

However, Meier does not concur. He concludes his argument by noting that there is not a great deal of supporting evidence for these kinds of midrashic interpretations outside of the Hebrew language. No other ancient Near Eastern language follows the same pattern of

²⁸ Bar Efrat 43-44.

²⁹ Fokkelman 142-143.

interruption.³⁰ He concludes by noting that there is not a great deal of supporting evidence for it outside of Hebrew.³¹

As we have seen, the significance of אָמַר as a marker of direct discourse varies within the biblical text. Although the vast majority of times that אָמַר is used, it is followed by direct discourse, there are times that this might not be the case.³² Take, for example, the difficult moment posed to the reader in the story of Cain and Abel. The Hebrew text reads as follows:

וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל-הָבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי בִּהְיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּקֶּם קַיִן אֶל-הָבֶל
אָחִיו וַיַּחַרְגֵהוּ

Why did Cain kill his brother? In most translations, the story reads as follows: Cain **said** to his brother Abel . . . and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him" (Genesis 4:8). Many scholars translate this אָמַר as "said" and therefore believe that this אָמַר must be a sign of direct discourse. One scholar writes that:

"Sometimes a difficult passage is susceptible of explanation as it stands, and can only lose by emendation. It is not to be supposed that the copyists omitted words which are so clear and so apparently necessary for the proper understanding of the text, and it seems more probably that we have here an archaic use of אָמַר in the sense of וַיְדַבֵּר 'and he spoke' which needs no amplification."³³

Nevertheless, another scholar--Albert Ehrman reminds the readers that Hebrew contains a class of verbs and nouns possessing one meaning and its diametric opposite. He believes that apart from its usual connotation of "to say" the verb אָמַר presents the case of being a verb of polarity, having the meanings respectively of "to exalt," "to praise," and its

³⁰ Meier 78.

³¹ Meier 78.

³² Meier 323.

³³ Ehrman, Albert, "What Did Cain Say to Abel?" *JRQ* 53 (1962) 164-167.

diametric opposite "to despise," "to hold in contempt" and by semantic development in the second case, the meaning "to be angry."³⁴ Where do we find the polarity of the verb אמר in the Bible? Isaiah 3:10--אמרו צדיק כי טוב--indicates that the verb אמר here carries the connotation of "to praise," to exalt. The first scholar to declare that אמר in Isaiah 3:10a has this meaning was Rabbi Elijah, the Gaon of Vilna in his Commentary (ביאור) to the Bible. There he states unequivocally that אמרו צדיק means שבחו את הצדיק. Other examples include Esther 1:18, Psalm 4:5, and Esther 7:5.

והיום הזה תאמרנה שרות פרס-ומדי אשר שמעו את-דבר המלכה
לכל שרי המלך וכדי בזיון וקצף:

This very day the ladies of Persia and Media, who have heard of the queen's behavior, will cite it to all Your Majesty's officials, and there will be no end to scorn and provocation! (Esther 1:18)

רגזו ואל-תחטאו אמרו בלבבכם על-משכבכם ודמו סלה:

So be angry, and sin no more; rage in your heart upon your bed, and sigh, Selah. [translation mine] (Psalm 4:5)

ויאמר המלך אחשורוש ויאמר לאסתר המלכה מי הוא זה ואי-זה
הוא אשר-מלאו לבו לעשות כן:

Then did the king Ahasuerus grow angry and say unto Esther the queen...(Esther 7:5)

Therefore, according to this approach, Genesis 4:8 should be read as follows: "And Cain despised Abel his brother. And it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him." We observe that the interpretation of the verb אמר

³⁴ Ehrman 166.

plays a significant role in the understanding of this story, even though it might not be a marker of direct discourse

לאמר

As discussed above, the infinitive לאמר comes close to being a decisive marker of direct discourse in biblical Hebrew. Although this fact is fairly significant, it prompts a number of its own problems. How did the infinitive of the root אמר achieve this function? And if it is a distinct marker of direct discourse, why does it not mark *all* direct discourse? Since there is more discourse that is not introduced by לאמר, what limits or encourages its manifestation before direct discourse?³⁵ The medieval commentators pondered the very same question, and concluded that "Scripture does not use the term לאמר except for a special purpose"³⁶ According to the Mishneh, לאמר appears in Exodus 5:1 to "teach that Israel would respond to every verse after Moses in the same way that they recite the Hallel"³⁷

Meier postulates that what began as a true infinitive of אמר became a particle marking direct discourse, uninflected for person, number, gender, or tense. Therefore, there is no need to translate לאמר before direct discourse any more than one would need to translate Greek *hoti recitativum* or Akkadian *umma*. Rather, all three of these phrases are used simply to indicate that what is to follow is a quotation. The quasi-infinitive לאמר could be extended to accompany even the verb אמר with no redundancy, because its purpose and function are dissimilar. This function as an indicator of direct discourse is confirmed by the

³⁵ Meier, *Speaking of Speaking*, 94.

³⁶ Sifre on Deut 3:23

³⁷ Sotah 5:4

universal appearance of speech immediately following it. When a finite verb introduces direct discourse, there is the distinct possibility that the marker and the speech might be interrupted by a noun or a pronoun to specify the speaker or the antecedent. There are four such examples of this phenomenon. The first is when both parties are named, as in Ex 8:1 "The LORD said to Moses." The second is when the speaker is named but the antecedent is referred to by pronoun, as in Exodus 10:28 "Pharaoh said to him." The third is when there is no named antecedent, but the speaker is named as in Exodus 10:25 "Moses said." Finally, the fourth is when the speaker is identified with a pronoun, but the antecedent is named as in Exodus 20:19 "They said to Moses." But out of the hundreds of appearances of *לֵאמֹר* before direct discourse, there is not a single clear case of any word intervening between it and the discourse that follows. There are three cases in which a word does interrupt, but these cases are textually suspect. The first time is in Leviticus 11:1 where we find *לֵאמֹר אֲלֵהֶם* (said to them) but the *LXX* omits this word *אֲלֵהֶם* (them). The other two occur in Genesis 23: "And the sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him, 'Hear us'" (Genesis 23:5-6) and "And Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, 'My lord, hear me'" (Genesis 23:14-15). However, if one compares these texts with other similar text within the same framework such as Genesis 23:10-11,13, there is an indication that a Masoretic misdivision has created confusion: the *לו* might be *לא* and should have been part of the quotation!³⁸ Therefore, there is no reliable evidence to show that any word intervenes between *לֵאמֹר* and the direct discourse that follows.

³⁸ Westermann 317.

Coming from the noun form דבר meaning "word," this verb has the meaning "to make words" or "to form words." When speakers used the verb to introduce direct discourse, the notion of forming or shaping words was focused by the use of the purpose infinitive לֵאמֹר, literally, 'to word (it) to say.' When we see the pattern of לֵאמֹר דבר before direct discourse we know that it is an isogloss with Phoenician. This might have paralleled the development in Aramaic of the infinitive לִמְמַר with the denominative מִלַּל (from מילה 'word').³⁹

There are approximately 575 times that speeches are marked in Genesis. Of these occurrences of direct discourse, there are but a few (some 3.5%) scattered examples that are introduced by the root דבר.⁴⁰ Most of the time דבר marks direct discourse in Genesis it either begins a dialogue (Gen 23:3, 34:8, 42:7, 43:20) or simply stands alone (Gen 8:15, 19:14, 24:30, 27:6, 34:20, 39:17, 19, 41:9, 50:4a, 4b). Is there a common link among these twenty occurrences of direct discourse introduced by this verb? The root דבר is explained by rabbinic sources as a verb that connotes a degree of severity in the words spoken, emphasizing this verb's forceful and even cruel overtones. For instance, Gen 42:7 and 42:30: "He spoke (וידבר) to them harshly", the rabbinic interpretation states that וידבר actually implies קשות (that he spoke to them harshly).⁴¹ Another example of harshness of tone might be found in the story of Lot. Lot pleads with his sons-in-law to leave the city: "Up, get out

³⁹ Meier 130-131.

⁴⁰ Meier 152.

⁴¹ *BT Makkot* 11a.

of this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city. But he seemed to his sons-in-law as one who jests" (Genesis 19:14). Shiloah agrees with this idea that the general rabbinic view of associated with the verb דבר with harshness.⁴² However, it does not seem to be the case every time in which the verb is used. God uses this verb for the first time to speak to Noah: "God spoke to Noah, saying, Come out of the ark, together with your wife, you sons, and your sons' wives" (Genesis 8:15). Although the element of cruelty is not noted in this text, this is a crucial moment in the flood account. What will Noah and his family find when they step out of the ark? Everything that one surrounded them is gone--and in a sense they must now re-create the world. Nevertheless, this is an interpretation of the text and not at all supported by the actual turn of events. In fact, the end result of leaving the ark is a positive one. The second time the verb דבר appears in the text is when God appears to Abram and proclaims his name El-Shadai. Abram throws himself on the ground, as if the forcefulness of the words compelled him to do so. Then God continued speaking, and reestablished the covenant with Abram (Genesis 17:3). Yet, דבר does not appear each time God appears, nor does cruelty play a role in this appearance. Furthermore, the promises made are, one again, positive in their nature. Therefore, one cannot come to the conclusion that there is a definitive meaning of דבר that would separate it from אמר.⁴³

The most obvious example of clustering דבר is in the narrative of Genesis 23 recounting Abraham's purchase of the cave of Machpelah. The use of the verb ונה in this chapter is also highly distinctive. Therefore, it is likely that the direct discourse concentration

⁴² Shiloah 261.

⁴³ Other verse include Genesis 27:6, 32:20-21, 34:8,20, 39:17,19, 41:9,17, 43:19-20, 50:4a,4b

of דבר marking direct discourse in this section of Genesis points to a different narrative tradition. It is strange that this chapter is precisely where the Greek tradition presumes a text that reads the root אמר instead of דבר, at least in two of the three cases, elsewhere in Genesis it is only in 8:15 that the Septuagint behaves in a similar manner, showing preference of אמר over the מל דבר. Noteworthy repetitions of דבר marking direct discourse within a single narrative in Genesis appear in each of the following narratives: the rape of Dinah (Gen. 34:8, 20), the dream interpretations of Joseph (Gen. 41:9, 17) and Joseph's final request of Pharaoh (Gen. 50:4).⁴⁴

ענה

The verb ענה tends to mark speech in dialogues after someone else has already begun the conversation. There are very few times that this verb is utilized to initiate discourse--although these exceptions do exist. Therefore, in most cases, ענה means to "make a reply" to a statement which precedes it. However, it does *not* mean to answer as in "to answer a question." When questions are asked, the responses are not usually introduced by the verb. More disconcerting, outside of the Pentateuch many statements that are introduced by ענה when they are not preceded by any previous speech to which they serve as an "answer." Therefore, it is questionable if "answer" is the correct translation of this verb.

There are few narratives that have a consistent use of the verb ענה to introduce direct discourse. One of the few places that it occurs with any consistency is the story of the purchase of the cave of Machpelah, in which Abraham barter with a resident in order to

⁴⁴ Meier 152-3.

secure a burial place for his wife Sarah. When Abraham requests to buy the burial plot, his speech is introduced by *עַנָּה*. Abraham then asks to purchase it from Ephron, whose response is introduced in the same way. The third time that Abraham makes this request, this time that he pay the full price of the site, the response is introduced with the root *עַנָּה*. Yet this is the most consistent usage of this verb in the Pentateuch.

Conclusion

We can conclude from these studies that direct discourse plays an invaluable role in the transmission of biblical narratives. The variety of markers of speech provided the writers with an assortment of means in which to fashion dialogue between characters. Speech is a favored means of expression because of the ability to express emotion directly from the character. This method is preferred by the biblical writers over providing the information through the narrator's voice. There is an array of variations on this theme, such as quoted direct discourse, verifiable and unverifiable. However, we cannot conclude that the presence of one verb as opposed to another is significant in terms of understanding the nature of relationships between people. There is no evidence that one gender favors one marker of direct discourse over another one; as we have discussed, *אָמַר* and *דָּבַר* function much in the same way. Therefore, the question is not one of semantics--rather, is there a contextual difference that may be discerned between men's speech and women's speech? As we will see, there is certainly more men's discourse in general to other men, women, and God than any other type of human discourse. But are there certain themes that can be distinguished? This is the question that we will begin to investigate.

Chapter Two: Men and their Spoken Relationships to Women

♦ INTRODUCTION

Those who are troubled with the connection between men and women in the biblical text tend to assume that a hierarchical situation existed in the time in which the text was written. The evident domination of females by their male counterparts reflects the patriarchal orientation of Hebrew scripture. We can deduce the inferiority of women from a multitude of texts, both by those who assume the androcentric inclinations of the Bible as authoritative and also by those who are made uncomfortable or are offended by them. The most liberal of feminists and the most conservative traditionalists share an understanding that the Bible depicts women as subordinate and inferior to men in rudimentary ways.¹

♦ THE NON-RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COUPLES IN THE TORAH

In many cases, male characters with significant speaking roles in the Torah never speak with their wives/concubines in the text. The only time that Adam and Eve connect through speech it is through a mediator--God. There is no direct communication between the two characters. Abraham only speaks to a woman three times in the text--and the only woman that he addresses is his beloved wife Sarah. Hagar, although she is the mother of his first born Ishmael, is never addressed publicly by her husband, and the only hint of non-reported speech that is directed toward her from Abraham happens when he forces her to leave their household. Isaac never addresses Rebecca--in fact, she has many more speaking parts in the

¹ Meyers 24.

text than he does¹ Potaphar never speaks to his wife (even when she addresses him) Moses does not speak with Zippora, neither when they meet, nor when they marry. Furthermore, when her father brought her out to Moses in the wilderness with their two children, the text states that he greeted his father-in-law, but makes no mention of greeting Zippora (or their children)

ויבא יתרו חתן משה ובניו ואשתו אל-משה אל-המדבר אשר-הוא
חנה שב חר האלהים: ויאמר אל-משה אני חתנך יתרו בא אליך
ואשתך ושני בניה עמה: ויצא משה לקראת חתנו וישתחו וישק-לו
וישאלו איש-לרעהו לשלום ויבאו האהלה.

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought Moses' son and wife to him in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mountain of God. He sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you, with your wife and her two sons." Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, he bowed low and kissed him; each asked after the other's welfare, and they went into the tent (Exodus 18: 5-7)

One might have expected this conversation to take place between a husband and wife, not between a father-in-law and a son-in-law. Perhaps if it had been accompanied by a single line--narrative or discourse--stating that Moses and Zippora greeted each other or acknowledged each other the impact would not have been as severe. The fact remains: none of these characters have a spoken relationship with his/her spouse.

Furthermore, as we shall discover in this chapter, when men do have a verbal relationship with their respective wives, it is rarely a positive alliance. If we are to examine the speech exchanged between men and their wives, we note that there are many times in which women do not respond when men speak to them. In fact, the women that allow their male counterparts to control them are much less likely to speak back for any reason, even if

the response has the potential of banality. For instance, when Abraham tells Sarah to prepare food for the strangers (the example used in Chapter One of this thesis), the biblical authors could have given her a single line of sorts--an acknowledgment of Abraham's words. Nevertheless, that text does not exist. Nor does it exist in many cases where women are in subordinate situations. However, in the majority of the cases where women *do* have a sense of control of the given situation, they are more likely to respond, and to stand up for themselves via the spoken word.

The first time that a man addresses a woman through speech is Lamech to his wives Adah and Zillah. The text reports that each Adah and Zillah bore Lamech two children. Immediately following this revelation, there is a bizarre monologue directed at the two wives. The reader hears Lamech acknowledge to his wives that he is a murderer:

וַיֹּאמֶר לַמֶּכַח לְנָשָׁיו עֲדָה וְצִלְחָה שְׁמַעְנָן קוֹלִי נָשִׁי לַמֶּכַח הָאֵזְנָה אִמְרָתִי
כִּי אִישׁ הֲרַגְתִּי לִפְעָעִי וְיֹלֵד לַחֲבֵרָתִי: כִּי שִׁבְעָתַיִם יָקָם - קִין וְלַמֶּכַח
שִׁבְעִים וּשְׁבַעַה:

And Lamech said to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; O wives of Lamech, give ear to my speech. I have slain a man for wounding me, and a lad for bruising me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold." (Genesis 4:23)

One would expect some sort of reaction from Adah and/or Zillah, yet no response is given--neither in speech, nor in the narrative. Furthermore, there is no consequence to this confession. Lamech's wives' roles in the text are twofold: to bear children, and to serve as the conduit to hear the confession of Lamech. Their lack of response to this confession is not surprising--the content does not directly affect them, and no response is solicited by Lamech. Therefore there is absolutely no reason for them to answer their husband. Yet someone

needed to be present to hear this boastful statement. Perhaps they were mentioned as the antecedents because just before this point in this text they had been mentioned in conjunction with Lamech's progeny. Nevertheless, they do not respond, nor are they heard from in the text. This lack of response is a paradigm that will be repeated throughout the text.

◆ ABRAHAM AND SARAH

Despite the great role that Abraham and Sarah play in the text, they never hold a conversation of any length recorded in the Torah. As we shall see, the authors make Abraham's relationship with God much more of a priority than his relationship with his wife (or with his concubine). Abraham only speaks to Sarah three times, each time to instruct her. The first time, the instruction is for his benefit, the second time it is for her benefit, and the third, it is neutral. Once again, the female counterpart is silent. Sarah's answers are not recorded in the text. The first time Abraham speaks to Sarah he instructs her as to how she should portray their relationship/marital status to strangers in Egypt:

ויהי כאשר הקריב לבוא מצרימה ויאמר אל-שרי אשתו הנה-נא
ידעתי כי אשה יפת-מראה את: והיה כי-יראו אתך המצרים ואמרו
אשתו זאת והרגו אתי ואתך יחיו אמרי-נא אחתי את למען ייטב-לי
בעבורך וחיתתך נפשי בגללך:

As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, 'I know what a beautiful woman you are. If the Egyptians see you, and think, 'She is his wife,' they will kill me and let you live. Please say that you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may remain alive thanks to you.' (Genesis 12:11-13)

Sarai makes no response to this mandate, but through the narration the reader knows that she

does in fact obey his request. She allows him to carry out his plan, even though it had the potential of placing her in great danger. Ramban says that not only did Sarai not respond to Abram in this verse, but *she* was never asked whether she was Abram's wife or sister, thus she never had to tell anyone that she was his sister. Ramban substantiates this point by showing that the pharaoh accuses *Abram* (and not Sarai as one might have expected) of not telling him her true status. He does not claim that Sarai lied to him--for as far as the records show, he never asked her to corroborate the story. Ramban contends that the pharaoh did not blame the woman, because "it is not proper for the woman to contradict her husband, it is proper for her to be quiet."² This pattern reoccurs during the second time that Abraham speaks with his wife in response to her anger about her maid-servant Hagar.

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל-שָׂרָי הִנֵּה שְׁפוֹתַי בְּיָדְךָ עָשִׂי-לִי הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ
וְהַעֲנֵה שְׂרִי וְתִבְרַח מִפָּנַי:

"Abram said to Sarai, 'Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right'" (Genesis 16:6). Sarah does not respond to this comment through speech, although once again the narrator tells the reader that she did hear his words and responded to them accordingly. The third--and final--time that Abraham addresses his wife, he runs into their tent and says to Sarah,

וַיִּמָּהֵר אַבְרָהָם הָאֵהָלָה אֶל-שָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר מַהֲרִי שְׁלֹשׁ סָאִים קֹמֶה
סֹלֶת לֹשִׁי וְעָשִׂי עֲנֹת:

"Quick, three *seahs* of choice flour! Knead and make cakes!" (Genesis 18:6). Once again,

² *Torat Chaim, Bereshit I*, קנח.

Sarah makes no comment, but we know that she "responded," for a few verses later we read that Abraham

וַיִּקַּח חֲמָאָה וְחֵלֶב וּבֶן-הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּתֵּן לִפְנֵיהֶם וְהָיָא-עִמָּד
עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ וַיֹּאכְלוּ

"took the curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them and he waited on them under the tree as they ate." Abraham never speaks kindly to Sarah. He is either concerned for his own life, annoyed (inferred from the fact that he was distressed over the way Sarah spoke about his concubine) or hurried.

♦ ELEAZAR, JACOB AND REBEKAH

Eleazar and Jacob share at least one commonality in the text: they speak to Rebekah and their words are recorded. Rebecca is spoken to more than any other woman in the Pentateuch--so it is ironic that the list of these men who speak to her does not include her husband Isaac. As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, women who take charge of situations or who are in control of a given situation tend to be "speakers." Rebekah epitomizes this behavior. We will look at Rebekah's power through speech in the following chapter, now let us examine Eleazar's and Jacob's respective relationship with her through their spoken word.

Rebekah and Eleazar have the one of longest conversations (the most exchanges) between a man and a woman in the whole Torah. Their speech is fairly coherent conversation, where both parties are speaking in response one to the other. He initiates the dialogue, asking her questions, to which she responds in clear, polite sentences. He addresses Rebekah twice,

the first time to ask for a sip of water

וירץ העבד לקראתה ויאמר הנמאִיני נא מעט-מים מכדך

"The servant ran toward her and said, 'Please, let me sip a little water from your jar'" (Genesis 24:17). She responds to him positively, telling him that not only should he drink, but that she would draw water for his camels as well. Unlike Abraham, who orders Sarah in the command form to quickly cook and prepare food for the strangers, Eleazar speaks in a polite tone of voice, and asks for the water. We must remember that their relationships are totally different. Abraham and Sarah are married and have known each other for quite some time by this point in the story, while Eleazar and Rebekah are strangers. This might very well have affected those patterns of speech. Rebekah waters Eleazar's camels as she has promised, and then he asks her a second set of questions asking for her identity and for hospitality.

ויאמר בת-מי את הגידוֹנָא לי היש בית-אבִיךָ מקום לנו ללִין:

"'Pray tell me,' he said, 'who's daughter are you? Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?'" (Genesis 24:23). Once again, he uses polite language and questions her in such a way that a response is necessary. She responds with answers that articulate the answers that he wishes to hear.

Although the text never records her husband and her older son speaking to Rebekah, she does have a lengthy and memorable conversation with Jacob, her younger son. Ironically, Rebekah does most of the speaking in this conversation. When Rebekah tells Jacob that he is to trick his father in order to receive the blessing of the first born, he objects to her plan

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל-רִבְקָה אִמּוֹ הֵן עֹשֵׂה אֶחָי אִישׁ שָׁעַר וְאֹנְכִי אִישׁ חֶלֶק
 אֹלָמִי יִמְשְׁנִי אָבִי וְהָיִיתִי בְעֵינָיו כְּמַתְעַתֵּעַ וְהִבְאִיתִי עָלָי קִלְקִלָּה
 וְלֹא בִרְכָּהּ

Jacob answered his mother Rebecca, "But my brother Esau is a hairy man and I am smooth-skinned. If my father touches me, I shall appear to him as a trickster and bring upon myself a curse, not a blessing!" (Genesis 27:11)

Atypical of most women's speech patterns, Rebekah rebuts Jacob's protests and persuades him to follow the plan, even though he is not at all sure that he can carry it out to its full conclusion. Jacob is not a terribly successful speaker. As will be discussed in the following section, he does give a lengthy speech to his wives, but this is much more of a monologue than it is a dialogue.

◆ JACOB, RACHEL, AND LEAH

The story of Jacob and his two wives--one beloved and beautiful, the other with "weak eyes"--is a well-known tale with many nuances and subtleties. When one thinks about the relationship between Jacob and each of his wives, the narrative relays that Rachel is the revered and cherished wife, while Leah was unloved. However, this attitude is not directly expressed by the dialogue that transpires between Jacob and each of these women. Perhaps we see it reflected with Leah--he speaks to her only once--indirectly--when he addresses both of his wives. Yet to his beloved Rachel for whom he works for fourteen years, he speaks harshly (even more so than Abraham spoke to Sarah). Jacob was infuriated with Rachel in response to her plea for children:

וַיַּחַר-אֵף יַעֲקֹב בְּרַחֵל וַיֹּאמֶר הֲתַזְחַח אֱלֹהִים אֹנְכִי אֲשֶׁר-מִנַּע מִמֶּךָּ

"Jacob was incensed at Rachel and said: 'Can I take the place of God, who has denied you fruit of the womb?'" (Genesis 30:2). This seems like a cruel and insensitive response to her plea--yet there is no reprimand or other response from Rachel. Nehama Liebowitz writes

"Our Sages were very exacting in their statements where the Patriarchs were concerned. If they found their conduct wanting, they had no qualms about drawing attention to it, they indicated, too, that the righteous man was eventually punished for his fault, emphasizing where it was recorded in the narrative and they did not excuse him."³

For instance, examine the following excerpt from *Bereshit Rabah*:

The Rabbis of the south in the name of R. Alexandri said regarding the following passage from Job 15:2: "Should a wise person answer with loquacious knowledge?" This verse concerns Abraham, as it is said (Genesis 16:2): "Abraham heard Sarai's voice" and the text (Job 15:2) "fill his stomach with the east wind" concerns Jacob, as it is said (Genesis 30:2): "And Jacob was furious." God--blessed be God's name--said to him, This is the way to answer those who are troubled? On your life, your children will stand before hers. [separating and elevating Joseph and Benjamin from the rest of the sons]⁴

The early commentators accused Jacob of giving an inappropriate answer to a plea from an embittered and tormented soul. Characteristically, they saw a parallel between Jacob's words here and an identical phrase elsewhere. Jacob had said here: "Can I take the place of God?" Later Joseph had repeated the same words to his brothers in Egypt: "Can I take the place of God?" (Genesis 50:19). What is the correlation between these two verses apart from their obvious verbal character? As emphasized by the Midrash, there is a connection by way of a

³ Liebowitz 331.

⁴ *Bereshit Rabbah* 71, 10.

contrast—humiliating and offending behavior set against sympathetic and comforting words. Jacob had retorted “Can I take the place of God?” in response to Rachel’s petition for help. He had rejected her request by pointing to the limits of his expertise in the matter. But this belittling of himself was not inspired by recognizing his limitations. Rather, it was motivated by Jacob’s desire to hide his reluctance to help his wife, in order to relieve himself of his responsibility toward her. Joseph, on the other hand, had proffered these words to his frightened and dismayed brothers (after their father’s death) who had come to ask his forgiveness and pardon for all they had done to him. He had reassuringly answered them with the words “Fear not, can I take the place of God?” Joseph likewise recognized his limitations but this belittling of himself had come to prove to his brothers and himself that judgement did not belong to him in his relations with them, but to God.

Not all our later commentators have shared this approach in dealing with Jacob’s seeming rudeness toward his beloved Rachel. Some have tried to seek an explanation or, at least, to find an extenuating circumstance. Others have, at least, tried to comprehend how the virtuous patriarch became a victim of such a blunder, or how he came to deviate from the high standards of conduct that befitted him. The only other time Jacob speaks to Rachel, he speaks to both of his wives simultaneously, and gives a lengthy explanation of the reasons that they need to leave their father’s house.

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶן רֵאשׁוּ אֲנִי אֶת-פְּנֵי אֲבִיכֶן כִּי-אֵינֶנּוּ אֵלַי כְּתַמֵּל שְׁלֹשׁ
וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבִי הֵיךְ עֹמְדִי: וְאַתֶּנָּה יֹדַעְתָּן כִּי בְּכָל-כַּחַי עֲבַדְתִּי אֶת-אֲבִיכֶן:
וְאֲבִיכֶן הִתֵּל בִּי וַחֲחַלָּף אֶת-מִשְׁכַּרְתִּי עֲשֶׂרֶת מָנִים וְלֹא-נָתַנוּ אֱלֹהִים
לְזֹרֵעַ עֹמְדִי אִם-כֹּה יֹאמְרוּ נָקְדִים יִהְיֶה שְׂכָרְךָ וְיִלְדוּ כָל-הַצֹּאֵן
נָקְדִים וְאִם-כֹּה יֹאמְרוּ עָקְדִים יִהְיֶה שְׂכָרְךָ וְיִלְדוּ כָל-הַצֹּאֵן עָקְדִים:
וַיַּצֵּל אֱלֹהִים אֶת-מִקְנֵה אֲבִיכֶם וַיִּתֶּן-לִי: וַיְהִי בַעַת יָחַם הַצֹּאֵן וְאִשָּׁא

עיני יארא בחלום והנה העתדים העלים על-הצאן עקדים נקדים
 וברדים ויאמר אלי מלאך האלהים בחלום יעקב ואמר הנני
 ויאמר שא-נא עיניך וראה כל-העתדים העלים על-הצאן עקדים
 נקדים וברדים כי ראיתי את כל-אשר לבן עשה לך אנכי האל
 בית-אל אשר משחת שם מצבה אשר נדרת לי שם נדר עתה קום
 בא מן-הארץ הזאת ושוב אל-ארץ מולדתך

[Jacob] said to [Rachel and Leah] "I see that your father's manner toward me is not as it has been in the past. But the God of my father has been with me. As you know, I have served your father with all my might, but your father has cheated me, changing my wages time and again. God, however, would not let him do me harm. If he said thus, 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flocks would drop speckled young, and if he said thus, 'The streaked shall be your wages,' then all the flocks would drop streaked young. God has taken away your father's livestock and given it to me. Once, at the mating time of the flocks, I had a dream in which I saw that the he-goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled, and mottled. And in the dream an angel of God said to me, 'Jacob!' 'Here,' I answered. And he said, note well that all the he-goats which are mating with the flock are streaked, speckled, and mottled, for I have noted all that Laban has been doing to you. I am the God of Beth-el, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now, arise and leave this land and return to your native land." (Genesis 31:5-13)

Other than this speech, which is one of the longest passages of direct discourse in the book of Genesis, Jacob does not address Leah. This speech should be underscored, not simply because of its length, but because of its content. God told Abram to go from his land, from his father's house... and he does not consult Sarai. Yet in this instance, the women are consulted, and moreover, give their affirmative response to the move. Perhaps as in the case of Lamech and his two wives, Rachel and Leah are the vehicles for relaying information which has not been told to the reader. In the case of Lamech, we do not hear about his violent nature but through this confession, just as in the case of Jacob, Leah and Rachel provide the earpiece for his oration.

◆ ABIMELECH/SARAH AND JUDAH/TAMAR:
WOMEN VINDICATED BY MEN

There are three times mentioned when specific women are violated in the text: Sarah, Tamar, and Dina. However, the resulting action of each one of these violations is quite different. In one case, Sarah, she is vindicated by speech which is addressed directly to her. In the second case, Tamar, she is vindicated, but the speech is not necessarily directed to her. And in the third case, Dina, there is no mention of vindication in speech, although her brothers certainly do take severe action to reclaim her honor. In two of these three cases, when a woman's status has been challenged in some manner, she is told that she will be vindicated. Sarah is the first woman to find herself in this situation during the first sister/wife episode in Genesis 20. Abimelech tells Sarah that she will be vindicated for the wrong that has been done to her:

ולשרה אמר הנה נתתי אלף כסף לאחייך הנה הוא-לך כסות
עינים לכל אשר אתך ואת כל ונכחת.

And to Sarah he said, "I herewith give your brother a thousand pieces of silver, this will serve you as vindication before all who are with you, and you are cleared before everyone." (Genesis 20:16)

Likewise, Tamar finds justice from her father-in-law Judah after he wronged her by not giving his third son to her as a husband, even though he was in fact required to do so. Instead, he tells her to

ויאמר יהודה לתמר כלתו שבי אלמנה בית-אביך עד-יגדל שלח בני
כי אמר פן-ימות גם-הוא כאחיו ותלך תמר ותשב בית אביה.

"...stay as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up" for he thought, "He too might die like his brothers." (Genesis 38:11)

Notice the tone that Judah uses to address his daughter-in-law. He speaks in the command

form, once again implying that she is subordinate to his control. When she hears from an undisclosed speaker that "Your father-in-law is coming up to Timnah for the sheepshearing" (Genesis 38:13), she immediately plans to regain her rightful status through Judah, since he has refused to give Shelah to her as a husband. During the implementation of her plan, Tamar and Judah negotiate the terms of their sexual encounter--a conversation which is initiated by Judah, but one in which Tamar is an active participant.

ויט אליה אל-הדרך ויאמר הבה-נא אבוא אליך כי לא ידע כי
כלתי הוא.....

"So he turned aside to her by the road and said, 'Here, let me sleep with you'--for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law" (Genesis 38:16). Notice that he uses the polite form that we saw when Eleazar spoke to Rebekah in order to ascertain if she was the match for Isaac. As far as he is concerned, Tamar is a stranger, and therefore, his language becomes far more polite than one would normally have addressed a family member, especially a subordinate female member. Judah then continues the negotiations.

ויאמר אנכי אשלח גדי-עזים מן-הצאן.....

"He replied, I will send a kid from my flock" (Genesis 38:17).

ויאמר מה הערבון אשר אתן-לך.....

"And he said, 'what pledge shall I give you?'" (Genesis 38:18).

ויכר יהודה ויאמר צדקה ממני כי-על-כן לא-נתתיה לשלה בני
ולא-יסף עוד לדעתה:

"Judah recognized them, and said, 'She is more in the right than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah'" (Genesis 38:26). The difference between this vindication and the

speech from Abimelech to Sarah is that Judah does not speak to Tamar directly--at least it is not reflected in the text. There is no mentioned antecedent. However, since she is the last person to speak, we can assume that he was speaking to her *and* to the people who witnessed Judah make the statement.

◆ MOSES

Moses never speaks to a woman in the text. One would have expected that he would have had some sort of sparse conversation with his wife, but as was stated above, no such dialogue occurred. He has no spoken relationship with his adoptive mother, nor with his biological mother--the former speaks in the text while the later does not. Considering the fact that we know nothing of Moses' life between his adoption by Pharaoh's daughter and his "going out to his kinsfolk and witnessing their labors" (Exodus 2:11) this is not surprising. However, his sister Miriam appears in the text during the escape from Egypt throughout the wilderness account. Yet Moses and Miriam never speak. Furthermore, Moses did in fact have a perfect opportunity in the text to speak to a woman--or to a small group of women, to be more precise. In the book of Numbers, we read the account of the daughters of Zelophehad who come to Moses with a plea: to allow them to inherit their father's property since there was no male heir to inherit. We know from the narrative that their plea was heard and accepted, but through the narrator and not through Moses.

◆ JOSEPH

Joseph speaks to a woman only once in the text. He tells Potaphar's wife that he will not lie

with her and sin before God

וימאן ויאמר אל אשת אדוני הן אדני לא ידע אתי מה בבית וכל
אשר יש לי נתן בידי אינני נדון בבית הזה ממני ולא חשך ממני
מאומה כי אב אותך באשר את אשתך ואיך אעשה הרעה הנדלח
הזאת וחטאתי לאלהים

He said to his master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master gives no thought to anything in this house, and all that he owns he has placed in my hands. He wields no more authority in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except yourself, since you are his wife. How then could I do this most wicked thing, and sin before God?" (Genesis 39:8-9)

Joseph tells his pursuer that he will not yield to her desires, for he has too much respect for his master and for God. This concludes Joseph's speaking contact with women characters in the text.

◆ THE MIDWIVES

This is the second time that a conversation transpires in the text between characters who are not related--either by blood or by marriage. The first time this type of conversation occurred was with Eleazar and Rebekah. In this dialogue, the pharaoh speaks to the midwives, instructing them to kill all of the Hebrew male babies in order to control the Israelite population in the land of Egypt.

ויאמר בילדכן את העבריות וראיתן על האבנים אם בן הוא
והמתן אותו ואם בת היא וחיה:

The king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, saying, "When you deliver the Hebrew women, look at the birth stool; if it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live." (Exodus 1:16)

However, the midwives did not follow Pharaoh's instructions at all because of their fear of

God. Pharaoh summons them, calling out to them angrily.

ויקרא מלך-מצרים למילדות ויאמר להן מדוע עשיתן הדבר
הזה ותחיו את-הילדים:

So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, letting the boys live?" (Exodus 1:18)

Initially, Pharaoh addresses the midwives because he has an order to impart. This time he addresses the women in order to ascertain why that order was not followed. The information requested is not of a personal nature, it is of national importance. Their behavior--and their words to Pharaoh will directly impact on the well-being of countless of slaves in Egypt.

♦ PRIEST OF MIDIAN (REUEL) TO HIS DAUGHTERS

After Moses flees from Egypt, he encounters another provocation. The daughters of Reuel encounter Moses at the well in Midian. He protects them from passers-by and they go home. Their father questions their early arrival:

ותבאנה אל-רעואל אביהן ויאמר מדוע מהרתן בא היום:

"When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, 'How is it that you have come back so soon today?'" (Exodus 2:18). They explain to their father how the "Egyptian" man saved them from the men at the well, and he responds:

ויאמר אל-בנותיו ואיו למה זה עזבתן את-האיש קראן לו ויאכל לחם:

"He said to his daughters, 'Where is he then? Why did you leave the man? Ask him in to

break bread" (Exodus 2:20). Note that Reuel does not respond to the provocation, only to the man who saved his daughters.

◆ CONCLUSION

There are a scattering of issues and patterns that begin to emerge during this discussion. Of course, these patterns are not absolute--they are generalizations based on the information that the reader may ascertain from the text. When men communicate with their respective wives (if they communicate with their wives at all), they do not communicate loving, tender thoughts. Those moments of intimacy are never recorded in the text--perhaps the biblical author felt that such discussion would prove to be imprudent. Certain relationships are characterized by the narrator as being full of devotion and caring, but this characterization is expressed *only* in the narration and not in the actual speech recorded between the two parties. Furthermore, when men address women that they are familiar to them--wives, daughters, or daughters-in-law--they do so in familial language, ordering women (i.e. Abraham to Sarah when he tells her to pretend that she is his sister, or when he tells her to make cakes), speaking down to women (i.e. Judah to Tamar when he instructs her to go to her father's house), and berating women (i.e. Jacob to Rachel when she begs him for children). Only when men address women who are strangers do they use "polite" language (such as when Judah addresses Tamar when he does not recognize her compared to the time when he addressed her and *did* know her identity.) Thus far, the relationship between men and women--as defined through male discourse to women, is generally quite negative.

Chapter Three: Woman to Man--the Intimate Relationship?

Women's communication with men in the Torah is sparse. Only six women speak to men in the whole book of Genesis--Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, and Tamar, and Potiphar's wife (who is unnamed). In the book of Exodus, even fewer women speak to men--the midwives, and Zippora (and we are not entirely sure to whom Zippora's speech is addressed). In the book of Numbers, the only trace of women's speech is when the daughters of Zelophehad bring their case to Moses. No woman speaks in the books of Leviticus or Deuteronomy. In the book of Genesis, the few times that women speak to men, they speak to their husbands about wanting to have intercourse--primarily for procreative and for status reasons. Yet outside of the book of Genesis, the few times that women speak to men, their speech is not about sexual matters at all. In fact, the few times women do speak to men outside of the book of Genesis the subject matter is business oriented. We will look at each of these women separately and determine the nature of their speech to their male counterparts.

◆ SARAH

Sarah is the first of the female biblical characters who speaks with a man. Her words are filled with jealousy and always regard sexual issues. She begins the pattern by which women in the book of Genesis speak to their husbands or other men about sexual matters. If one is to analyze Sarah through her spoken words toward her husband, she is not seen in a favorable way by the biblical authors. Sarah's actions are contradictory and somewhat

irrational. The first time she speaks in the text, she encourages Abram to consort with Hagar:

ותאמר שרי אל-אברם הנה-נא עזרני ידוד מלדת בא-נא
אל-שפחתי אולי אבנה ממנה.

"And Sarai said to Abram, 'I look, the Lord has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid, perhaps I shall have a son through her'" (Genesis 16:2). Yet the next time she speaks, Sarah subsequently blames Abraham for Hagar treating her poorly on account of the fact that he had sexual relations with her:

ותאמר שרי אל-אברם חמסי עליך אנכי נתתי שפחתי בחיקך
ותרא כי הרתה ואקל בעיניך ישפט ידוד ביני וביניך.

"The wrong done me is your fault! I myself put my maid in your bosom; now that she sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her esteem. The LORD decide between you and me" (Genesis 16:8). Sarah wins this battle--Abraham gives her permission to treat Hagar as she wishes. Sarah's speech is not recorded again until several years later, when Ishmael is a young boy and Sarah gives birth to Isaac. The third and final time that Sarah speaks, she demands Abraham to kick Hagar and Ishmael out of the household:

ותאמר לאברהם גרש האמה הזאת ואת-בנה כי לא יירש
בן-האמה הזאת עם-בני עם-יצחק.

"Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac" (Genesis 21:10). The reason that Sarah gives for the banishment of Hagar and her prodigy is clear--she tries to protect her son's status by forcing Abraham's elder son away from the establishment.

These are the only three times that Sarah speaks to Abraham in the text, and the writers portray her as a jealous, spoiled, uncaring woman through these actions. Sarah has reason to be concerned. Concubinage as a social institution has long been known to have existed in ancient Babylon. Hammurabi's Code mentions it, but restricts its application to the case where the wife was a priestess.¹ The Code does state that if a concubine does succeed in having children, and she claims equality with her mistress, she can be punished by having to resume her former slave status. Furthermore, the Code declares that if a man wishes to separate from his wife who has borne him no children, he shall give her the amount of her purchase money and the dowry which she brought from her father's house, and let her go.² Certainly, Abraham made no threat of any sort to Sarah about leaving her or asking her to leave, but the social mores were vulnerable to this type of action. There are ancient Near East texts that deal specifically with this matter. The Nuzi contracts that deal with this matter actually determine that should the wife prove to be barren she must give her husband a slave-woman. For example, "(Miss) Kelim-ninu has been given in marriage to Mr. Shennima... If Kelim-ninu does not bear, Kelim-ninu shall acquire a woman of the land of Lulu (i.e., a slave-girl) as wife for Shennima."³ It is clear from this kind of documents that it is the husband who made the stipulation to take a concubine in these cases, but in the biblical examples that we have, it is the wife's initiative. Nevertheless, it is obvious from these practices that in these societies female sterility was a disgrace.

¹ *The Ancient Near East*, Volume I, 172.

² ANET 153.

³ ANET 220.

It should be noted that the Midrashim attempt to rectify this ungainly image of Sarah through their interpretation. Rambam conveys that Abraham did not simply take Hagar-- "Sarah took" Hagar and gave her to Abraham-- Abraham waited until this moment to start relations with Hagar. This is plausible conclusion. However, Rambam continues:

The text also mentions that Sarai "Abram wife" took Hagar and gave her to Abraham her husband "to be his wife" to show that Sarai had not given up hope of having children from Abraham, and did not keep away from him but they still remained husband and wife. However, she also wished that Hagar should also have the status of wife and not merely be his concubine. All of this underlines Sarah's righteous character and the respect that she showed to her husband.

This contention is totally unsupported by the discourse that Sarah utters. From the information that we have about Sarah and her relationship with Hagar, she is painfully aware of her shortcoming as a barren woman, and displays tremendous jealousy of her maid servant through her discourse with Abraham. In fact other commentators take the opposing view and condemn Sarah for her actions based upon these lines. Ramban states that Sarah sinned in her relationship with her maid servant. Because of this sin, he continues, God gave her a son who was destined to bring suffering upon his parents Abraham and Sarah.⁴ Whether her actions were justifiable according to the situation, Sarah's speech does not exemplify the pious, carious, gracious Matriarch that the later commentators personify. The few times that Sarah speaks to her husband, her words concern her status and her son's status, as well as Abraham's sexual relationship with another woman. She portrays herself as a complex and jealous personality through her discourse with Abraham.

⁴ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit* / רמב"ם.

◆ REBEKAH

Rebekah is a fascinating character for the purposes of this study because she does not fit the pattern established by the other matriarchs. Rather, she sets her own mold, and is duplicated by few women in subsequent text. There seems to be a direct correlation between Rebekah's ability to speak and her capability to manipulate various situations. Rebekah is the first woman who takes control through her speech, speaking just as much as (or more than) her husband. The biblical authors introduce Rebekah in conjunction with Eleazar, Abraham's servant. He appears outside the city of Nahor with his entourage of ten camels, laden with a selection of gifts for Isaac's future spouse. One can imagine the extraordinary sight that awaits Rebekah as she approaches the well at evening time. Rebekah is ravishing, but the biblical authors define her not only according to her beauty: They make her an active participant in all matters that pertain to her (and later to her family.) Rebekah addresses the Abraham's servant, tends to his needs and to the needs of his camels.

ותאמר שתי אדני ותמהר ותרד כדה על-ידה ותשקהו: ותכל
להשקתו ותאמר גם לגמליך אשאב עד אם-כלו לשתת.

"Drink, my lord," she said, and she quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and let him drink. When she had let him drink his fill, she said, "I will also water your camels, until they finish drinking" (Genesis 24:18-19). She then provides him with hospitality as he has requested:

ותאמר אליו בת-בתואל אנכי בן-מלכה אשר ילדה לנחור ותאמר
אליו גם-תבן גם-מספוא רב עמנו גם-מקום ללון:

"She replied, 'I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.' And she went on, 'There is plenty of straw and feed at home, and also room to spend the night'" (Genesis 24:24-25). When she is asked if she would marry Isaac, she gives verbal consent and determines that she will go with Abraham's servant without delay. None of the other women in the text are asked if they would marry their future husbands--Rebecca is the only one.

This verbal consent should be examined closely. Whether Rebekah's consent was required for the marriage itself or because in this case she had to leave her father's land for a foreign land is not clear. But a fascinating parallel to the degree of independence enjoyed by the woman is to be found in a Nuzi manuscript which accounts that a male gives his sister in marriage to a certain Hurazzi man. In the presence of witnesses the bride proclaimed: "With my consent my brother Akkulenri gave me as wife to Hurazzi." The act of speaking such consent seems to play an important role in the exchange. Another fascinating point to be emphasized is that we do not hear Laban or Bethuel asking the question. *They* are silent! We only hear Rebekah's response to their question, which is posed by the narrator in third person. The act of Rebekah giving her acceptance vocally seems to be more important than hearing the question.

In later years, Rebekah's voice will again become the focal point of her component of securing the paternal blessing for her favorite son, Jacob. Through her speech, she manipulates the action, devises and implements the plan to fool Isaac.

Rebekah plots with Jacob--when he is weak and unsure whether this is the correct thing to do, she convinces him otherwise

ורבקה אמרה אל-יעקב בנה לאמר הנה שמעתי את-אביך מדבר
אל-עשו אחיך לאמר חבואה לי ציד ועשה-לי מטעמים ואכלה
ואברככה לפני ידוד לפני מותי ועתה בני שמע בקלי לאשר אני
מצוה אתך לך-נא אל-הצאן וקח-לי משב שני נדיי עזים טובים
ואעשה אתם מטעמים לאביך כאשר אהב והבאת לאביך ואכל
בעבר אשר יברכך לפני מותו

Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "I overheard your father speaking to you brother Esau, saying 'Bring me some game and prepare a dish for me to eat, that I may bless you, with the Lord's approval, before I die.' Now, my son, listen carefully as I instruct you. Go to the flock and fetch me two choice kids, and I will make of them a dish for your father, such as he likes. Then take it to your father to eat, in order that he may bless you before he dies." (Genesis 27:6-10)

Rebekah has already shown her ability to speak to a stranger and choose her destiny to become Isaac's wife. Now, she continues to utilize her tongue to assure her Jacob will succeed in fulfilling his destiny. Rebekah speaks out to her son, demanding a certain action from him by which the will of God will be fulfilled. Even though he is unsure of her request, and attempts to defy her wishes, she replies in a manner which gives him no choice in the matter:

ותאמר לו אמו עלי קללתך בני אך שמע בקלי ולך קח-לי:

"Your curse, my son, be upon me! Just do as I say and go fetch them for me" (Genesis 27:13)

Her words are authoritative and Jacob accepts her control without arguing back again. Rebekah is the only mother in the Pentateuch to address a son or a daughter. Because she is the only one to do so, it is unclear if this is a significant observation. However, we do notice

that Jacob listens to, responds to, and obeys his mother's requests. The same observation can be made in the following quotation:

These final words that Rebekah speaks to her son are ones which save his life. She knows from the reports that have been brought to her about her son (the way Jacob will eventually receive reports about his sons from Joseph) are true, and senses the immediate danger that Jacob faces:

ויגד לרבקה את-דברי עשו בנה הגדל ותשלח ותקרא ליעקב
בנה הקטן ותאמר אליו הנה עשו אחיך מתנחם לך להרגך. ועתה
בני שמע בקלי וקום ברח-לך חרנה וישבת עמו ימים אל-לבן אחי
אחדים עד אשר-תשוב חמת אחיך עד-שוב ממך ושכח את אפי-
אחיך אשר-עשית לו ושלחתי ולקחתיך משם למה אשכל
גם-שניכם יום אחד:

When the words of her older son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, "Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you. Now, my son, listen to me. Flee at once to Haran, to my brother Laban. Stay with him a while, until your brother's fury subsides--until your brother's anger against you subsides--and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will fetch you from there. Let me not lose you both in one day!" (Genesis 27:42-45)

Once again, Rebekah speaks in clear complete thoughts, without interruption. Her purpose is to save both of her sons--Jacob from Esau, and Esau from the authorities. She is levelheaded and in control. She is--by far--the most astute and masterful of the matriarchs, and yet she embodies womanly charm and virtue in her conduct, in her spirited discourse, in her thoughtfulness, and in her self-assurance through dialogue. Rebekah does not fit the mold in any manner. Her significant relationships with men through speech are with Abraham's servant Eleazar and with her son Jacob. She speaks to her

husband only once toward the end of her portion of the narrative after her children are grown men (and therefore does not have the opportunity to "beg" her husband to give her children or attention as do Sarah, Leah and Rachel)

◆ RACHEL and LEAH

Rachel and Leah each have their spoken moments with their husband Jacob--he rebukes one and does not respond to the other. Rachel speaks twice, Leah speaks once, and the final words that they speak to Jacob are recorded as if they spoke to him together. When they speak separately, the issue revolves around sexual matters--each sister wants to sleep with her husband in order to conceive and receive recognition from her husband for her ability to provide him with sons. Rachel begins by begging her husband for children. Leah had already borne four sons to Jacob before Rachel's envy finally explodes in confrontation with Jacob. Just as progeny was a sign of divine favor, so barrenness was a sign of divine punishment or of the woman being forgotten by God. There was no worse fate than barrenness in a patriarchal society in which a woman's main function was the bearing of children. Therefore, Rachel's jealousy and anger burst forth at Jacob in the impulsive and violent outcry (which happens to be Rachel's first recorded speech in the Bible)

וְתָרָא רָחֵל כִּי לֹא יֵלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב וַתִּקְנָא רָחֵל בְּאַחֲתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר
אֶל-יַעֲקֹב הִבֵּה-לִּי בָנִים וְאִם-אֵין מִתָּה אֲנֹכִי:

"When Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she became envious of her

sister, and Rachel said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" (Genesis 30:1). The demand give (יִבְרָה) is explosive, and the sense of dying expresses imminence (lit. "I am dead"). Rachel, the barren wife, asks not for one child but for children (lit. בְּנִים--plural). Jacob's rebukes his wife, with a curious and unfeeling reply: "Am I in the place of God, who as withheld from you the fruits of the womb?" Nevertheless, in desperation to yield progeny for her beloved husband, Rachel tells Jacob to take her maid Bilhah

וְתֹאמַר הִנֵּה אִמְתִּי בִלְהָה בָּא אֵלַיָּה וְתֵלֵד עִלַּי-בְּרִכִּי וְאִבְנָה גַם-אֲנֹכִי מִמֶּנָּה.

"Consort with her, that she may bear on my knees and that through her I too may have children"(Genesis 30:3). He does so, and Bilhah does give birth to a son for Jacob/Rachel. Leah then "borrows" Jacob from her sister, and relays to him in a somewhat humorous moment in the text that "you are to sleep with me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes" (Genesis 30:16). It proves to be a good deal for both sisters. Leah proceeds to bear three more sons and a daughter, while Rachel also conceives and bears a son, God at last having "opened her womb."

Rachel and Leah share a rare moment of strength and unity in 31:14-16 as they convince Jacob together that the household inheritance might belong to them

וְתַעַן רָחֵל וְלֵאָה וְתֹאמַרְנָה לוֹ הַעוֹד לָנוּ חֶלֶק וְנַחֲלָה בְּבֵית אֲבִינוֹ:
הֲלוֹא נִכְרִיּוֹת נָחֲשַׁבְנוּ לָךְ כִּי מִכְרֵנוּ וַיֹּאכֶל גַּם-אֹכֹל אֶת-כֶּסֶּפֵּנוּ כִּי
כָל-הָעֵשֶׂר אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֱלֹהִים מֵאֲבִינוּ לָנוּ הוּא וְלִבְנֵינוּ וְעַתָּה כָּל
אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֱלֹהִים אֵלֶיךָ עֲשֵׂה:

Then Rachel and Leah answered him, saying, "Have we still a share in the inheritance of our father's house? Surely, he regards us as outsiders, now that he has sold us and has used up our purchase price. Truly, all the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, do as God has told you." (Genesis 31:14-16)

However, this moment of force in the sister's spoken words is tainted, for the words that they respond to are unverifiable speech. There is no record of the interesting dream that Jacob relayed to the women. Even though they are not lying, they assist him in perpetuating his lies, therefore reducing the effectiveness of their speech. However, their speech does provide the only information we have about Leah and Rachel's relationship with their father--their impressions is that he regards them as "outsiders" now that he has used up their purchase price. Yet they, like the daughters of Zelophehad hint that they and their children should be the inheritors of their father's estate. They do not stress this point, but they make it indirectly.

Rachel speaks to a man once more in the text--when her father comes to their entourage in search of his household idols. Rachel hides the idols under her, and blatantly lies to her father, using a familiar excuse to excuse her inability to rise before him.

ותאמר אל-אביה אל-יחר בעיני אדני כי לוא אוכל לקום מפניך
כי-דרך נשים לי ויחפש ולא מצא את-התרפים.

For she said to her father, "Let not my lord take it amiss that I cannot rise before you, for the period of women is upon me" (Genesis 31:35). Not only does she lie about the fact that she is menstruating, but she does so by utilizing a sexual matter to fool her father. This is the only time that this father and daughter communicate. Rachel's theft of the teraphim is subject to many interpretations ranging from psychological to legal, all attempting to explain her apparent rash behavior. The Nuzi texts demonstrate that the household gods were the very

heart of the family and appear to have been passed down through either traditional or willed lines of inheritance. Thus in nearly all interpretations of this incident, the Nuzi evidence has been cited.⁵

◆ TAMAR

Whereas Sarah does not utter a word in her own defense, neither when Abraham asks her to pose as his sister, nor when she is in danger of being defiled by Pharaoh/Abimelech, Tamar does quite the opposite. She takes matters into her own hands, and using her words in a deceptive manner, manages to re-acquire her status and her position in the society. When she hears that her father-in-law is on his way toward her for the sheepshearing, she dresses in a way so that he will not recognize her, and allows him to proposition her. Then, she takes charge, and manipulates him into a position from which he cannot escape. First, she negotiates her price:

ויט אליה אל-הדרך ויאמר הבה-נא אבוא אליך כי לא ידע כי
כלתו הוא ותאמר מה-תתן-לי כי תבוא אלי:

“What,” she asked, “will you pay for sleeping with me?” (Genesis 38:16). When he offers a kid from his flock (not the one that she deserved or expected all of those years!) she corners him:

ויאמר אנכי אשלח גדי-עזים מן-הצאן ותאמר אם-תתן ערכון עד
שלחך:

⁵ Anchor Bible Dictionary 1161.

“You must leave me a pledge until you have sent it” (Genesis 38:17). She then specifies what that pledge should be:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֶה הָעֵרָבוּן אֲשֶׁר אֶתֶּן-לְךָ וְתֹאמַר חֲתָמְךָ וּפְתִילְךָ וּמַטְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדְךָ וַיִּתֶּן-לָהּ וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ וַתְּהַר לּוֹ

“Your seal and cord, and the staff which you carry” (Genesis 38:18). Finally, after she succeeds in getting pregnant, and he orders her put to death (not that he seemed terribly concerned about her welfare or mentioned a word about her until this point in the narrative)

Tamar says to Judah

הוּא מוֹצֵאת וְהִיא שֹׁלַחַת אֵל-חַמּוּהָ לֵאמֹר לְאִישׁ-אֵלֶּה לִּי אֲנִכִּי
הָרָה וְתֹאמַר הֵכֵר-נָא לְמִי חֲתָמָת וּפְתִילִים וְהַמָּטָה הָאֵלֶּה:

“I am pregnant by the man to whom these belong. Examine these--whose seal and cord and staff are these?” (Genesis 38:25). Sure enough, through these two conversations with Judah, she regains her status in society. Tamar is admired as a woman who asserted her rights in a patriarchal society--albeit through deception--despite Judah's attempt to deny them. As Rebekah helps Jacob obtain the blessing which was rightfully his according to the Divine plan, Tamar uses the power of the word to obtain what is due to her. Yet, as opposed to Sarah, who regained her status and wealth, there seems to be a lingering injustice here. Judah leaves Tamar as a single mother, with no hint of assistance for her child or for herself. After he vindicates her, he never speaks to her nor to their offspring again.

♦ POTIPHAR'S WIFE

Once again, the central issue here is sexual. We already know from the text that Joseph was

good looking so it is not surprising that his good looks get him into a crisis. After he had lived in Potiphar's house for some time, the text tells us that Potiphar's wife looked at Joseph and simply said, "Lie with me" (Genesis 39:7). When he refused, the woman turns against Joseph and pretends that he is the perpetrator. It is interesting to compare her statement to her servants and her statement to her husband:

ותקרא לאנשי ביתה ותאמר להם לאמר ראו הביא לנו איש
עברי לצחק בנו בא אלי לשכב עמי ואקרא בקול גדול ויהי
כשמעו כי-הרימתי קולי ואקרא ויעזב בגדו אצלי וינס ויצא
החוצה.

She called out to her servants and said to them, "Look, he had to bring us a Hebrew to dally with us! This one came to lie with me, but I screamed aloud. And when he heard me screaming at the top of my voice, he left his garments with me and got away and fled outside." (Genesis 39:14-15)

ותדבר אליו כדברים האלה לאמר בא-אלי העבד העברי
אשר-הבאת לנו לצחק בי ויהי כהרימי קולי ואקרא ויעזב
בגדו אצלי וינס החוצה.

Then she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew slave whom you brought into our house came to me to dally with me, but when I screamed at the top of my voice, he left his garment with me and fled outside." (Genesis 39:17-18)

From the context of the story, the reader knows that her words are totally fabricated. She cannot gain Joseph's affections, so she resorts to lying in order to show him that her words are more powerful than his. We have noted how the smallest change in phraseology, any addition or omission to the text, may mark significant issue. Potiphar's wife reported that Joseph left his garment "by me" instead of "in her hand" as had actually happened. Otherwise the truth might have become self-evident to her hearers. She did not change her account

regarding Joseph's panicked flight in freeing himself from her while in her chamber and his resumption of this normal pace as he left it, for fear that her slaves had, perhaps seen Joseph leave. But when she repeated the story to her husband she stressed simply that "he fled out" in order to strengthen the sense of his guilt. She underscored both in the account to her slaves, who heard nothing, and to her husband that she cried out, in order to exonerate herself from any impression of being an accessory to the deed.⁶

Further light is thrown on Potiphar's wife's evil slandering of Joseph in another subtle difference between her articulation of the account to her slaves, and following to her husband. She does not use the term "slaves" when addressing the slaves themselves. Joseph is simply called **איש עברי** (literally, a Hebrew man). To her husband, however, she says **העברי** (the Hebrew slave). In order to win over her slaves and gain their empathy she tries not to establish any feeling of cooperation among the slaves for Joseph as one of them. They would instinctively take the side of a fellow rather than the side of the master or mistress. Therefore she carefully altered her tone and said that it was not one of *them* but a stranger, a *Hebrew*, the common enemy of all of them.⁷ To intensify the impression and stimulate their hostility toward Joseph she does not say that the Hebrew slave came unto me, but rather, "Look, he had to bring us a Hebrew to dally with us!"⁷ She tried to transmit to them that "the Hebrew has not only wronged me but all of us; he has dishonored the whole Egyptian nation!" This conception would have been rather far from the truth. Potiphar's wife lumps her slaves together with herself as part of one category in her effort to gain pity. The common

⁶ Leibowitz 418.

⁷ Leibowitz 418-419.

adversary is the Jew. The extensive gap between the two is disregarded, the tremendous class distinction between slave and master is overlooked in the cause of temporary self-interest.*

◆ THE MIDWIVES

The midwives bravely defied Pharaoh's command that they kill every male Jewish baby. They did not defy him by flatly refusing to do his will--that would have meant certain death for the midwives, and would not have been productive. The midwives made up excuses for their lack of success.

ותאמרן המילדת אל-פרעה לא כנשים המצריות העבריות כי-חיות
כי הנה בטרם תבוא אלן המילדת וילדו.

"Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, they are vigorous. Before the midwife can come to them, they have given birth" (Exodus 1:19). Instead of making excuses that they were "only following orders" and that they were "good citizens following the law" even though in their hearts they knew that it was unjust, they decided to choose the higher principle of saving live over Pharaoh's command. The nuance of their conversation that we are interested in here is the fact that these two midwives speak directly to the ruler of Egypt. He addresses them, they respond to his questions. When Sarah is vindicated by Abimelech, the king addresses her, but she does not reply. Unlike the status of women in many other ancient civilizations, Egyptian women seemed to have enjoyed the same legal and economic rights as the Egyptian man--at least theoretically. This concept is supported in Egyptian artistry and inscriptions. We are unsure why these privileges extended for the

* Liebowitz 419.

woman in Egypt but no where else in the ancient world. It may well be that such rights were ultimately related to the theoretical role of the king in Egyptian society. If the pharaoh represented the corporate character of the Egypt, then men and women might not have been seen in relationship to each other, but only in regard to this royal center of society. Since Egyptian national identity would have derived from all people sharing a common relationship with the king, then in this association, which all men and women shared equally, they were--in a sense--equal to each other. This is not to say that Egypt was an egalitarian society--it was not. Judicial distinctions in Egypt were based much more upon social differences in the social classes, rather than differences in gender. Rights and privileges were not consistent from one class to another (as we saw above with the discussion regarding Potiphar's wife), but within the given classes, it seems that equal economic and legal rights were, for the most part, corresponded to both men and women.⁹⁹ Nahum Sarna writes that until as late as the sixteenth century of this era, midwifery was everywhere an exclusively female occupation. "It was regarded as a violation of the code of modesty for a male, even a doctor, to be present at a birth. Midwifery was thus one of the few occupations open to women, and it seems to have been a prestigious profession in ancient Egypt." Therefore, we can expect that they midwives were in a higher socio-economic position, and that their relationship with Pharaoh was based upon this aspect of their rank.

⁹⁹ Piccione, Peter A. "Excursus III: The Status of Women in Ancient Egyptian Society" 1.

◆ ZIPPORA

This passage spoken by Zippora is one of the least-understood moments of direct discourse in the entire text. For our purposes there is no named antecedent. We are not sure if she speaks to Moses or to their child. The meaning of her words is elusive because the terminology is not used elsewhere in the text.

ותקח צפרה צר ותכרת את-ערלת בנה ותגע לרגליו ותאמר כי
חתן-דמים אתה לי וירף ממנו אז אמרה חתן דמים למולת

So Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched his legs with it, saying, "You are truly a bridegroom of blood to me! And when He let him alone, she added, "A bridegroom of blood because of the circumcision" (Exodus 4:25-26)

◆ THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD

Our final example of woman's speech directed to men in the Pentateuch is a appealing one. The daughters of Zelophehad are the "first--and only--group of women who speak out to men for what they believe to be correct *without* the use of trickery or lies. Moses prepares the Israelites to enter the Land of Israel and assigns a portion of land to each family. The inheritance of this property is to pass from father to son from one generation to the next. When the daughters of Zelophehad heard this, they rose in protest before Moses. Standing in front of the *mishkan* they tell Moses and the leadership of the community that the law inheritance from father to sons (and not to daughters) is unjust:

ותעמדנה לפני משה ולפני אלעזר הכהן ולפני הנשיאם וכל-העדה
פתח אהל-מועד לאמר: אבינו מת במדבר והוא לא-היה בתוך
העדה הנועדים על- ידוד בעדת-קרח כי-בחטאו מת ובנים לא-היו
לו: למה יגרע שם-אבינו מתוך משפחתו כי אין לו בן תנה לנו אחזה
בתוך אחי אבינו:

Our father died in the wilderness. He was not one of the faction, Korah's faction, which banded together against the LORD, but died for his own sin and he has left no sons. Let not our father's name be lost to his clan just because he had no son! Give us a holding among our father's kinsmen!" (Numbers 27:2-4)

Pinchas Peli writes that these women "are not presented as private individuals but as genuine representatives and spokeswomen of all members of their sex." He continues, and remarks that when the daughters hear Moses announce the laws of inheritance, they realize that they are not included. Instead of immediately rushing forward and loudly challenging him, the Torah says that וַתִּקְרַבְנָה (they drew near).¹⁰ In other words, they demonstrated patience, organized themselves, discussed the matter, formulated an approach, and then calmly "drew near" to Moses with their concerns. Other rabbinic interpreters also claim that the five daughters chose their tactics and words of protest with great care. Although they considered the Torah law was unfair to them and to others, they demonstrated constant loyalty to Moses, to their people, and to the Torah. They drew the contrast between their father who had remained loyal to Moses and other Israelites who had followed Korah. Moreover, they intentionally used expressions that clarified the distinction between them and those who had said to Moses: "Give us a captain, and we shall return to Egypt." Imitating that statement, they tell Moses, "Give us an inheritance in the land." In this way, the rabbis tell us, the daughters proved their exceptional commitment to their people and to the Land of Israel.

¹⁰ Fields, Harvey. *A Torah Commentary for Our Times*. Volume II: Exodus and Leviticus. 36.

◆ CONCLUSION

There are certain themes that appear throughout the study of woman's speech to men. Many of our examples tend to utilize speech to gain their husband's/potential lover's affections, either for procreation or other status related issues (Sarah, Rachel, Leah). These type of women use patterns of speech which ring of jealousy toward another wife/concubine. In most cases, there is a certain unassertiveness toward men. Frontal confrontation does not occur in the majority of the stories we have discussed. These women achieve their goals through means of trickery and bargaining, and rarely through pure and honest speech. Those that do use deception are no more successful in their endeavors than those that do not. In two of the situations where women show a position of strength, their male counterparts turn to God for counseling about how to deal with the issue (Sarah when she asked Abraham to expel Hagar from the household, and Zelophehad daughters when they ask Moses to allow them to inherit their father's estate.) Female characters who are "weak" players--those who generally do not make their own decisions--do not respond to men's speech. Conversely, those women that take charge of situations tend to speak back more. These are the common themes that are found when women speak to men in the Pentateuch. This chapter further substantiates the notion from Chapter Two: many difficulties arise when men and women communicate with each other in the Pentateuch.

Chapter Four: Man to Man--Business, Politics, and Power Plays

♦ INTRODUCTION

There are numerous examples of "man to man" direct discourse in the Torah. In fact, there are so many instances of this type of dialogue that it is difficult to divide the cases character by character as in chapters two and three. Abraham speaks to a variety of people, and his speaking continues from scene to scene. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, this chapter is arranged by story instead of by character. The majority of the times that men speak to men in the text, their concern focuses on business and economic related matters (not strictly interpersonal ones). There are a few situations that do not fit this patterns, but the vast majority do. Further, many of these characters succeed, or attempt to succeed in these matters by way of deceptive practices. We will further explore these themes in the following chapters.

The Book of Genesis

♦ THE FIRST MURDER

The first episode of direct discourse between two human beings in the text is one which has been the cause for vast commentary: the "dialogue" that transpired between Cain and Abel in the field.

וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל-הָבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי בַּהֲיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּקֶּם קַיִן אֶל-הָבֶל

אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ:

"Cain said to his brother Abel . . . and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother

Abel and killed him" (Genesis 4:8). As stated in Chapter One, there is a problem with this incident of direct discourse: "We have a named speaker and a named antecedent, but we have no record of what is said." Some believe that the occurrence of וַיִּאמֶר in this instance does not mean speech at all, as was previously discussed.¹ In most English translations, the translators mark the unrecorded "speech" with three dots, which draw attention to the interruption. The Aramaic Targums, like the Greek, Syriac, Latin, and Samaritan versions of the text, add "Come let us go into the field" which solves the difficulty by introducing the speech. However, this emendation is noticeably absent in the Masoretic Text. Nevertheless, Ramban also took this to be the sense of the passage.² Others took Hebrew וַיִּאמֶר to mean, "He had words with him."³ Since we have no way of knowing what this dialogue could have been, it will no longer be treated as direct discourse for the duration of this study.

♦ THE FIRST SISTER WIFE INCIDENT

The sister-wife motif occurs three times in the Torah. This is the first of the incidents. All three passages give essentially a similar account: a patriarch (Abram/Abraham, or Isaac) visits a foreign nation in the company of his wife (Sarai/Sarah, or Rebekah). Fearing that the woman's attractiveness might become a source of danger to himself as the husband, the man resorts to the scheme of passing himself off as the woman's brother, and gains economic

¹ Ehrman, Albert 164-167.

² *Torat Chaim, Bereshit* I, 89.

³ Sarna *Understanding Genesis* 33.

success and material possessions in each exchange, either directly or indirectly. This first account is told almost entirely in the narrative (with the exception of Abram's request of Sarai and the following quotation). After God afflicted Pharaoh and his household with plagues on Sarai's account, Pharaoh called Abram and said to him:

ויקרא פרעה לאברם ויאמר מה-זאת עשית לי למה לא-הגדת לי כי
אשתך הוא. למה אמרת אחתי הוא ואקח אתה לי לאשה ועתה הנה
אשתך קח ולך.

Pharaoh sent for Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me! Why did you say 'she is my sister,' so that I took her as my wife? Now, here is your wife, take her and begone!" (Genesis 12:18-19)

Pharaoh literally threw him out of the land (putting men in charge of him to escort him out of the land) (Genesis 12:20). We know from this action as well as the grammatical construction of Pharaoh's speech that he was furious --he tells Abram to קח ולך (take her and get out). The consequence of Abraham's deception is that he gains great economic wealth due to his "sister" Sarah's connection with the Pharaoh.

♦ ABRAHAM and LOT

The next encounter that Abraham has is with his nephew Lot. One of the apparent themes that emerges from Abraham's speech as opposed to Lot's speech is Abraham's magnanimous behavior versus Lot's selfish nature. The narrative explains that Lot and Abraham each had so many possessions that the land could not support them both. Therefore, they needed to spread their respective material possessions out over a larger area of land--an issue of dividing up territory. Additionally, their herdsmen were quarreling; with one another about undisclosed

matters. Therefore, Abraham addresses Lot, and selflessly offers his nephew the first choice of grazing lands and watering places.

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל-לוֹט אֶל-נָא תְּהִי מְרִיבָה בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶיךָ וּבֵין רְעִי
וּבֵין רְעִיךָ כִּי-אֲנָשִׁים אַחִים אֲנַחְנוּ כָּל-הָאָרֶץ לִפְנֶיךָ הִפְרֵד נָא
מֵעָלֵי אֲב-הַשְּׂמָאֵל הֲלֹא וְאִימְנָה וְאֲב-הַיְמִין וְאֲשַׁמְאִילָהּ

Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, between my herdsmen and yours, for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you? Let us separate, if you go north, I will go south, and if you go south, I will go north" (Genesis 13 8-9)

Abraham recognizes that a problem existed and it would only continue to grow. Therefore, they decide to dissolve their partnership of sorts. Lot does not respond to Abraham's offer through speech, rather, the narrator offers information about the lands Lot chose. This lack of response is significant. Not only does Lot neglect to thank Abraham for his generosity, but he does not acknowledge the offer at all. Radak says that Abraham acknowledges that he has seniority, and should be the one to choose the piece of land.⁴ However, he offers his nephew Lot first choice in order to avoid quarreling and bickering. Ramban elaborates on this point, remarking that Abraham wishes to avoid strife in order to give the appearance of unity between Lot and himself, so they will not appear weak in front of the Canaanites and the Prizites.⁵

◆ ABRAM'S RESCUE OF LOT

Lot, by virtue of his association with Sodom is taken captive and his possessions are pillaged.

⁴ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit I, קסא*.

⁵ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit I, קסב*.

Upon learning the news, Abram, with the help of three (non-vocal) allies, immediately musters an armed force and mounts a military campaign to rescue his nephew. After he liberates Lot, he is greeted and blessed by Melchizedek, priest-king of Salem.

ומלכי - צדק מלך שלם הוציא לחם ויין והוא כהן לאל עליון.
ויברכחו ויאמר ברוך אברהם לאל עליון קנה שמים וארץ, וברוך
אל עליון אשר-מגן צריך בידך ויתן - לו מעשר מכל

And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine, he was a priest of God Most High. He blessed them, saying, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your foes into your hand." And [Abram] gave him a tenth of everything. (Genesis 14:18-21)

He mentions God not once, but twice in his blessing, and praises Abram, for he is connected with this God. Abram offers him a tithe of the booty, perhaps in payment for this blessing? Therefore, this is a business transaction, of sorts. In direct contrast, the King of Sodom speaks next, offering a business proposition that Abraham deems unacceptable.

ויאמר מלך-סדם אל-אברהם תן-לי הנפש והרכש קח-לך:

"Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the persons, and take the possessions for yourself'" (Genesis 14:21). Abram is not at all pleased with this offer, and responds accordingly:

ויאמר אברהם אל-מלך סדם הרימתי ידי אל-ידוד אל עליון קנה
שמים וארץ: אם-מחוט ועד שרוך-נעל ואם-אקח מכל-אשר-לך ולא
תאמר אני העשרתי את-אברהם: אכלו הנערים וחלק האנשים אשר
הלכו אתי ענר בלעדי רק אשר אשכל וממרא הם יקחו חלקם:

But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I swear to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth: I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap of what is yours; you shall not say, 'It is I who made Abram rich.' For me, nothing but what my servants have used up; as for the share of the

men who went with me--Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre--let them take their share
(Genesis 14:22-25)

Abram refuses to take anything from this king, for to be connected with one who is associated with so much evil would go against Abram's character. Furthermore, Abram was only interested in rescuing his nephew; he did not engage in battle for the remains. The first king offers praise for God and Abram returns his words with payment. The second king makes an unacceptable offer, and Abram refuses his transaction.

◆ ABRAHAM and the THREE MEN

This is the first example of a group of men speaking to an individual man. Why would these strange men speak to Abraham? As we begin to infer from the text, these are not ordinary human beings. They have a message for Abraham from an undisclosed source. However, their message is a sign from God that the contract between God and Abraham will eventually be fulfilled. The first indication of something unusual is their knowledge of Sarah's name.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו אֵיךְ שָׂרָה אִשְׁתְּךָ:

"They said to him, 'Where is your wife Sarah?'" (Genesis 18:9). As noted by Rambam, this question is merely a rhetorical device for the purpose of politely opening a conversation about Sarah, similar to the question that God asks Adam "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9).⁶ Abraham responds to them: הִנֵּה בָאֵהָל "There, in the tent" (Genesis 18:9). They continue speaking to Abraham, even though their words will affect Sarah (who is now listening from inside the

⁶ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit I*, רי.

tent) They inform him that his barren wife is about to have a child

ויאמר שוב אשוב אליך בעת חיה והנה - בן לשרה אשתך ושרה
שמעת פתח האהל והוא אחריו

Then one said, "I will return to you next year, and your wife Sarah shall have a son!" (Genesis 18:10)

They give Abraham inside information that this child would arrive, although they do not reveal their source. These men never reveal through speech that they are messengers of God. Rashi states that we may infer that these messengers are divine in the following manner: the man who speaks in 18:10 guarantees that he will return at the time when Sarah will give birth. Only an immortal being could affirm that he would be alive at a given time in the future. Therefore, Rashi surmises, this being claims indirectly that he is divine.⁷ However, it is unclear that the antecedent is aware of this divine status. Apparently, God wishes to deliver a message to Abraham that the contract between them will be fulfilled--that he will indeed have a son to inherit the land. God knows that Abraham is concerned about progeny, therefore, God sends messengers to appease him. Abraham does not respond to this proclamation, and this is the end of their involvement with Abraham and Sarah. God sends these messengers to assure Abraham that their contract will indeed come to fruition. God will not breach this condition of their contract.

♦ LOT: CONVERSATION WITH THE MEN

This is the second conversation that happens between a group of men and an individual man.

⁷ *Torat Chaim*, Bereshit I, 857.

Unlike the first recorded dialogue with the positive message relayed to Abram about Sarah's impending pregnancy, this conversation does not have affirmative connotations. In the Abram dialogue there are three exchanges, the first sentence initiated by the group of men, responded to by Abram, and answered by one of the group. In this dialogue, a similar pattern occurs. The group speaks, Lot responds, and the group speaks again.

וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל-לוֹט וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אֵיחָהּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר-בָּאוּ אֵלֶיךָ הַלַּיְלָה
הוֹצִיָאם אֵלֵינוּ וְנִדְעָה אֹתָם.

And they shouted at Lot and they said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may be intimate with them."
(Genesis 19:5)

The people of Sodom are demanding and rude, willing to take advantage of these strangers for their own pleasures. The meaning of their words is undeniably sexual. The biblical authors introduce their discourse with the verb **וַיִּקְרְאוּ** which has a stronger meaning than to simply "call out." In Genesis 26:9, Abimelech calls Isaac **וַיִּקְרָא** and berates him for lying about Rebekah. Another example is Exodus 1:18 when Pharaoh calls **וַיִּקְרָא** the midwives and reprimands them for their disobedience. In this instance, the men of Sodom scream out at Lot. Ramban says that it was their "custom" to have intercourse with male strangers who arrive in the city. Hospitality was a sacred duty in the Near East and bestowed upon the guest the right of asylum. However, perhaps offering hospitality was not customary in the city of Sodom--where there was so much evil already. When Lot offered hospitality to these men, he might have breached the convention of the city. By context we may infer that the people of Sodom were inflamed. Why else would Lot have shut the door behind him when he stepped out of the house? Furthermore, we may infer that Lot is aware that he has breached

the convention, because he offers the men a compromise--a replacement model in the place of these strangers.

ויצא אליהם לוט הפתחה והדלת סגר אחריו ויאמר אל-נא אחי
תרעו הנה-נא לי שתי בנות אשר לא-ידעי איש איציה-נא אתחן
אליכם ועשו להן כטוב בעיניכם רק לאנשים האל אל-תעשו
דבר כי-על-כן באו בגל קרתי.

So Lot went out to them to the entrance, shut the door behind him, and said, "I beg you, my friends, do not commit such a wrong. Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you please, but do not do anything to these men, since they have come under the shelter of my roof" (Genesis 19:7-8)

The biblical authors stressed Lot's warm hospitality to the strangers who arrived in Sodom. He was, after all, Abraham's nephew. Even though he was not like Abraham in many ways, he might have learned the art of welcoming the stranger. Lot knew that it was the host's responsibility to protect guests from danger, even at the risk of exposing himself (or his family or possessions) to the danger.*

ויאמרו גש-הלאה ויאמרן האחד בא-לגור וישפט שפוט עתה נרע
לך מהם ויפצרו באיש בלוט מאד ויגשו לשבר הדלת:

But they said, "Stand back! The fellow" they said "came here as an alien, and already he acts the ruler! Now we will deal worse with you than with them" (Genesis 19:9)

Their speech intensifies, becoming more violent and riotous. Lot's plea has fallen on deaf ears, and the people are no longer interested in compromise or pacifying themselves. They are in a mood for a battle, and from what we know of the text, some sort of combat is steadily

* Sarna, JPS Commentary on Genesis 150.

approaching. They do not expect the sudden flash of light that appears from the doorway of the house. These are the last recorded words of the people of Sodom before their city and the surrounding areas are destroyed.

Unlike the Abraham dialogue with the messengers from God, Lot and his visitors continue the conversation within the house. Now that Lot has seen a taste of the strangers' power, he is ready to listen to what they have to say. They identify themselves as messengers of the Lord and tell him that the city and the whole area surrounding them will be destroyed.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶל-לוֹט עַד מִי-לָךְ פֶּה חָתָן וּבְנִיךָ וּבְנֹתֶיךָ
וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-לָךְ בְּעִיר הַזֶּה מִן-הַמָּקוֹם כִּי-מִשְׁחָתִים אֲנַחְנוּ
אֶת-הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי-גְדֹלָה צַעֲקָתָם אֶת-פְּנֵי יְדֹד וַיִּשְׁלַחֵנוּ
יְדֹד לִשְׁחָתָהּ:

Then the men said to Lot, "Whom else have you here? Sons-in-law, your sons and daughters, or anyone else that you have in the city--bring them out of the place. For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against them before the LORD has become so great that the LORD has sent us to destroy it." (Genesis 19:12-13)

Lot certainly takes their words to heart. He has seen their power against the men of the city, and is willing to accept their word that the city will be destroyed. However, Lot's word is not taken as earnestly when he tries to repeat the same message to his sons-in-law:

וַיֵּצֵא לוֹט וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל-חֲתָנָיו לֵקְחֵי בְנֹתָיו וַיֹּאמֶר קוּמוּ צֵאוּ מִן-הַמָּקוֹם
הַזֶּה כִּי-מִשְׁחָתִית יְדֹד אֶת-הָעִיר וַיְהִי כַמֶּצְחָק בְּעֵינֵי חֲתָנָיו:

So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, "Up, get out of this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-laws as one who jests (Genesis 19:14).

These sons-in-law are fairly peripheral to the family--never speaking and having nothing more to do with the story. Their purpose is to lower Lot's status by not giving thought to his

words. This action implies that Lot's word had not been taken seriously in the past. Nevertheless, Lot knew that he had little time to spare, for the next morning the angels told him that it was time to leave the city.

וכמו השחר עלה ויאצו המלאכים בלוט לאמר קום קח את-אשתך
ואת-שתי בנותיך הנמצאות פן-תספה בעון העיר:

As dawn broke, the angels urged Lot on, saying, "Up take your wife and your two remaining daughters, lest you be swept away because of the iniquity of the city" (Genesis 19:15)

Yet, in these final moments, Lot reconsiders. He does not respond to the messengers (yet) but it is quite obvious that he does not make haste in the manner that the messengers intended. Therefore, they take him, his wife, and his two unmarried daughters by the hand and figuratively drag them outside the boundaries of the city. At this moment, they make a second attempt to convince him that this matter is an urgent one. If we compare these two utterances, the imperative does not change--the intensity does. The first verse uses the phrase קום קח (get up and take) while the second one employs a much stronger phrase to make the point--המלט על-נפשך (run for your life!). The biblical authors repeat the word המלט (run) to emphasize the urgency of the escape. There are only three times that this word המלט appears in this form: twice in this verse, and once in 19:22.

ויחי כהוציאם אתם החוצה ויאמר המלט על-נפשך אל-תביט
אחריך ואל-תעמד בכל-הככר ההרה המלט פן-תספה:

"Flee for your life! Do not look behind you, nor stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills, lest you be swept away!" (Genesis 19:17) Yet, the urgency and the immediacy of his words do not affect Lot's unwillingness to leave this land. The messengers have a specific purpose

and they are unyielding in their efforts to complete their task. Lot tries to bargain with the angels/men to compromise their objectives, and allow him to settle in a small town nearby.

ויאמר לוט אלהם אל-נא אֲדַנִּי הִנֵּה-נָא מֵצָא עֲבָדְךָ חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ
וּתְגַדֵּל חֲסֶדְךָ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי לְהַחְיֹת אֶת-נַפְשִׁי וְאֵנֹכִי לֹא
אֵיכָל לְהַמְלֹט הָרְחָה פֶּן-תִּדְבַּקְנִי הָרָעָה וּמָתִי. הִנֵּה - נָא הָעִיר
הַזֹּאת קְרִיבָה לָנוֹס שָׁמָּה וְהִיא מִצְעָר אִמְלֹטָה נָא שָׁמָּה הֲלֹא
מִצְעָר הוּא וְתַחֲי נַפְשִׁי:

But Lot said to them, "Oh no, my lord! You have been so gracious to your servant, and have already shown me so much kindness in order to save my life, but I cannot flee to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die. Look, that town there is near enough to flee to, it is such a little place! Let me flee there--it is such a little place--and let my life be saved." (Genesis 19:18-20)

Lot emphasizes the fact that this town is a small place, if it is not included in the zone of destruction that it will not affect the ultimate ambition of eradication of this evil area. He is unhappy with the offer that he has already been given--an offer that he very well could not refuse. It is interesting to note that he does not include his wife and his two daughters as part of the negotiations. Surely, they were allowed to go with Lot to this small town in order to survive the impending destruction. However, the next verse uses ambiguous language. One cannot be sure that they were included, although there is no evidence that they were excluded.

ויאמר אליו הנה נשאתי פניך גם לדבר הזה לבלתי הפכי את-העיר
אשר דברת: מהר המלט שמה כי לא אוכל לעשות דבר עד-בֹּאךָ
שמה על-כן קרא שם-העיר צוֹעַר:

He replied, "Very well, I will grant you this favor too, and I will not annihilate the town of which you have spoken. Hurry, flee there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there." Hence the town came to be called Zoar. (Genesis 19:21-22)

The angels have a defined plan action. First they instruct Lot to depart, and direct him to remove his relatives as well. Once he could not convince his sons-in-law to go, they proceed to their contingency plan, to inform the unmarried daughters who live in Lot's home, and escape with them. One could consider these messengers agents of God, commissioned to remove Abraham's nephew from the impending destruction. Once they have convinced Lot to depart from this land, their mission is complete, and they leave Lot in his new place. God's messengers are like temporary workers who have a short term work load, and disappear when their work is complete. Lot understands that the city of Sodom is doomed and that he should leave, yet he does not want to leave his successful lifestyle and his community. His material wealth and his personal status are far too important for Lot to consider the bigger picture.

♦ ABRAHAM and ABIMELECH

The relationship between Abraham and Abimelech originates with the second sister-wife incident in the Torah. As we observed with the first version of this story, the king's men kidnap Sarah (reason unknown in this version) and God came to him in a dream to inform him of his grave mistake. Once Abimelech is aware of his error, he immediately summoned Abraham and said

ויקרא אבימלך לאברהם ויאמר לו מה-עשית לנו ומה-חטאתי
לך כי-חבאת עלי ועל-ממלכתי חטאה גדלה מעשים אשר
לא-יעשו עשית עמדי: ויאמר אבימלך אל-אברהם מה ראית
כי עשית את-הדבר הזה:

Then Abimelech summoned Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? What wrong have I done that you should bring so great a guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done to me things that ought not to be done. What, then," Abimelech demanded of Abraham: "was your purpose in doing this thing?" (Genesis 20:9-10).

It is interesting how the speech changes from the first sister/wife account to this second account. In the first account, the pharaoh simply asks "What is this you have done to me? Why did you say 'she is my sister,' so that I took her as my wife? Now, here is your wife, take her and begone!" However, in comparison with the later version, one may infer that the pharaoh had relatively no interest in the answer to the questions that he posed. Pharaoh is concerned only for himself, while Abimelech is concerned for himself *and his subjects*. He asks Abraham three times for an explanation. Unlike the first account, where the biblical authors recorded no response from Abraham, he responds and reveals his logic:

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם כִּי אָמַרְתִּי רֵק אֵין-יִרְאָה אֱלֹהִים בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה
וַהֲרִגוּנִי עַל-דְּבַר אִשְׁתִּי; וְגַם-אִמְנָה אַחֲתִי בַת-אָבִי הוּא אֵךְ לֹא
בַת-אָמִי וְתַחֲלִי לִי לְאִשָּׁה; וַיֹּחֲזִי כַאֲשֶׁר הִתְעוּ אֹתִי אֱלֹהִים מִבֵּית
אָבִי וַיֹּאמֶר לֹה זֶה חֶסֶדְךָ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂי עִמָּדִי אֵל כָּל-הַמָּקוֹם
אֲשֶׁר נָבֹא שָׁמָּה אֲמַר-לִי אַחִי הוּא:

"I thought," said Abraham, "surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. And besides, she is in truth my sister, my father's daughter though not my mother's, and she became my wife. So when God made me wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'Let this be the kindness that you shall do me: whatever place we come to, say there of me: He is my brother.'" (Genesis 20:11-13)

This is a case of unverifiable quoted direct discourse. Biblical narrative contains a number of illustrations in which an individual voices his/her unspoken musings from an earlier point in time. The strategic purpose of such quotations is to demonstrate the point of view of the speaker at an earlier time in an attempt to make his listener identify with his feelings both then and at the present moment. In this verse, Abraham tries to excuse his action by appealing to his earlier fear for Sarah's security, but the narrator has made no endeavor to support Abraham's claim to these thoughts. Abraham can claim to have thought anything at all, and

no other character can possibly refute him. As such, the value of such thoughts is intrinsically limited.⁹ In the following verse, we observe how effective Abraham's words will be

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִימֶלֶךְ הִנֵּה אֶרְצִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ שֶׁב־

"And Abimelech said, 'Here, my land is before you, settle wherever you please'" (Genesis 20:15). Abraham successfully convinces Abimelech that his answer is plausible and that he is worthy of forgiveness. Unlike the first account of the story, where the pharaoh sends Abram and Sarai away, they are now invited to stay in the dominion of the ruler. Abimelech invited Abraham to give an explanation for his actions, Abraham explained himself (whereas in the last account he had no response) and the outcome was favorable. Abraham keeps his wealth, Sarah is vindicated (as we have already discussed in a previous chapter) and with this command to settle in the land, the second sister-wife narrative concludes. This episode provides the basis for future agreements, pacts, and negotiations. It allows the two characters to make an initial exchange. The next time that Abimelech speaks to Abraham, it is about a different matter altogether. However, the content is not clearly defined:

וַיְהִי בַעַת-הַהוּא וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִימֶלֶךְ וּפִיכֹל שַׂר-צְבָאוֹ אֶל-אַבְרָהָם
לֵאמֹר אֱלֹהִים עִמָּךְ כִּכְלָ אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה וְעַתָּה הִשְׁבַּעָה לִּי
בְּאֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה אֲנִי-תֹשֶׁקֶר לִי וּלְנִינִי וּלְנַכְדֵי כַחֲסֹד אֲשֶׁר-עָשִׂיתִי
עִמָּךְ תַּעֲשֶׂה עִמָּדִי וְעַם-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-נָרְתָה בָּהּ:

At that time Abimelech and Phicol, chief of this troops, said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything that you do. Therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my kith and kin, but will deal with me and with the land in which you have sojourned as loyally as I have dealt with you." (Genesis 21:22-23)

⁹ Savran 49.

We know that these two leaders ask Abraham for fair treatment and to deal with them equitably. Radak and Ramban say that Abimelech comes with his advisor Phicol after they heard about Isaac's birth--assuming that Abraham is powerful, wealthy, and close to God--and attempt to modify the agreement that Abimelech made with Abraham after the sister-wife incident. They demand that Abraham provide payment for the land that had already been given to him: protection and fair treatment for three generations.¹⁰ This statement implies that Abraham possessed a certain amount of power that was feared and respected among the inhabitants of the land. Therefore, Abimelech and Phicol ask Abraham to make a treaty of alliance which establishes the rights, duties, and obligations of the parties toward each other. In response, Abraham agrees to this treaty (though we still are unsure to what it refers):

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִרְהָם אֲנִכִּי אֲשַׁבֵּעַ

"And Abraham said: 'I swear it'" (Genesis 21:24).

The Midrash tells us that Abraham admonishes Abimelech, saying that he will swear to this new modification, but only out of the goodness of his heart.¹¹ Abraham tells the king that he has treated him unjustly; he then tells Abimelech that the king's servants have seized a well from Abraham's servants. Abimelech denies knowledge of this incident, saying that:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִימֶלֶךְ לֹא יָדַעְתִּי מִי עָשָׂה אֶת-הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְגַם-אַתָּה
לֹא-הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי וְגַם אֲנִכִּי לֹא שָׁמַעְתִּי בְלַתִּי הַיּוֹם:

But Abimelech said, "I do not know who did this; you did not tell me, nor have I heard of it until today." (Genesis 21:26)

¹⁰ *Torat Chaim Bereshit 1*, רמח.

¹¹ *Torat Chaim Bereshit 1*, רמח.

Abimelech denies knowledge of this incident, but states his readiness to make a new treaty. These are business negotiations. They are attempting to establish ownership of property and land rights. It appears that there was a question pertaining to the ownership of this specific well. Therefore, they make a new agreement, or modify the agreement to indicate that the well is the property of Abraham. In order to establish this ownership, Abraham must give Abimelech something of value. Out of the payment for the rights to live on the land, Abraham takes seven ewes, and puts them aside for this purpose.

ויאמר אבימלך אל-אברהם מה הנה שבע כבשת האלה אשר
העבתי לברדנה:

"Abimelech said to Abraham, 'what are these seven ewes?'" (Genesis 21:29). Abraham answers, saying that they are payment, not for the rights to live on the land, but for something else:

ויאמר כי את-שבע כבשת תקח מירי בעבור תהיה-לי לערה
כי חפרתי את-הבאר הזאת:

"He replied, 'You are to accept these as proof that I dug this well' (Genesis 21:30). Therefore, Abraham establishes ownership of the well in addition to authenticating his right to inhabit the land.

◆ EPHRON

After the climax of his life is behind him, Abraham begins to conclude his affairs. His most immediate concern is to find a burial place for his wife Sarah. He begins to negotiate with the citizens of the land to buy a burial site--the Cave of Machpelah--to fulfill this need:

ויקם אברהם מעל פני מתו וידבר אל-בני-חת לאמר: גר-ותושב
אנכי עמכם הנו לי אחזת-קבר עמכם ואקברה מתי מלפני:

Then Abraham rose from beside his dead, and spoke to the Hittites, saying, "I am a resident alien among you, sell me a burial site among you, that I may remove my dead for burial" (Genesis 23:3-4)

Abraham uses the phrase גר-ותושב (resident alien) to describe his status. This phrase indicates that Abraham was disadvantaged in a legal sense. An alien could not legally acquire land. He is usually classified in biblical literature among the oppressed of society, along with the widow and the orphan (Leviticus 25:23). Therefore, Abraham needed to petition the Hittites to allow a special transaction to occur. They respond to Abraham with respect and honor:

ויענו בני-חת את-אברהם לאמר לו: שמענו אדני נשוא אלהים
אתה בתוכנו קבר את-מתך איש ממנו את-קברו מבחר קברינו
לא-יכלה ממך מקבר מתך:

And the Hittites replied to Abraham, saying to him, "Hear us, my lord: you are the elect of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places; none of us will withhold his burial place from you for burying your dead." (Genesis 23:5-6)

ויקם אברהם וישתחו לעם-הארץ לבני-חת: וידבר אתם לאמר
אם-יש את-נפשכם לקבר את-מתי מלפני שמעוני ופגעו-לי
בעפרון בן-צחר ויתן-לי את-מערת המכפלה אשר-לו אשר
בקצה שדהו בכסף מלא יתננה לי בתוכם לאחזת-קבר:

Thereupon, Abraham bowed low to the people of the land, the Hittites, and he said to them, "If it is your wish that I remove my dead for burial, you must agree to intercede for me with Ephron son of Zohar. Let him sell me the cave of Machpelah that he owns, which is at the edge of his land. Let him sell it to me, at the full price, for a burial site in your midst." (Genesis 23:7-9)

The narrator specifically mentions that the negotiations were by the gate of the city in the

company of an abundance of Hittites. Throughout the Near East it was customary to conduct the affairs of the community at this locale. Many Nuzi documents end with the formula "The tablet was written after the proclamation in the entrance of the gate."¹² The intention of such a clause was to exhibit that the negotiation took place in a public forum, in the presence of witnesses, so that there would be no possibility of future litigation.¹³ Ephron was among the hearers and therefore he answered Abraham:

לא-אדני שמעני השדה נתתי לך והמערה אשר-בו לך נתתיה
לעיני בני-עמי נתתיה לך קבר מתך:

"No, my lord, hear me: I give you all the field and I give I give you the cave that is buried in it; I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead" (Genesis 23:11). Now that Ephron's name has been mentioned specifically by Abraham, he can begin negotiating with Abraham directly, and the bargaining begins.

וידבר אל-עפרון באזני עמי-הארץ לאמר אך אם-אתה לו
שמעני נתתי כסף השדה קוז ממני ואקברה את-מתי שמה:

Then Abraham bowed low before the people of the land, and spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the land, saying, "If only you would hear me out! Let me pay the price of the land; accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there." (Genesis 23:13)

Abraham repeats his request directly to the seller, even though it is quite clear he must have heard the original oration. This time, Ephron may ask his price, now that Abraham has made it quite clear what he desires:

אדני שמעני ארץ ארבע מאת שקל-כסף ביני ובינך מה-הוא

¹² Tucker, Gene M. JBL, 85 (March 1966) 77.

¹³ Sarna 169.

And Ephron replied to Abraham, saying to him, "My lord, do hear me! A piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver--what is that between you and me? Go and bury your dead" (Genesis 23:15)

Ephron finally sets his price, and the narrator tells the reader that Abraham accepted these terms. This haggling between the two men reveals many uses of ancient legal terminology that is a feature of Near Eastern court registers. For instance, the cave that he requires is described as being בקצה שדהו (on the edge of his land) which is a term used in many property transfer documents, expressing that the access to the land would not require trespassing on that person's property in order to obtain access. This is a binding verbal contract.

◆ ELEAZAR and ABRAHAM

Abraham commissions his faithful servant--whom we assume to be Eleazar--to set out for Aram-Naharaim in order to find a wife for his son from among Abraham's family.

ויאמר אברהם אל-עבדו זקן ביתו המשל בכל-אשר-לו שים-נא
ידך תחת ירכי: ואשביעך בידוד אלהי השמים ואלהי הארץ אשר
לא-תקח אשה לבני מבנות הכנעני אשר אנכי יושב בקרבו: כי
אל-ארצי ואל-מולדתי תלך ולקחת אשה לבני ליצחק:

And Abraham said to the senior servant of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, "Put your hand under my thigh and I will make you speak by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell, but will go to the land of my birth and get a wife for my son Isaac." (Genesis 24:2-4)

Ramban questions why this servant is the one whom Abraham chooses, and why he must swear not to marry Isaac to a foreigner. After all, Abraham could have called Isaac himself--who is a grown man by this point in the account--but chose to entrust his servant with the duty of procuring a wife for Isaac. Ramban suggests that Eleazar may be the trustee for Abraham's estate, and thus he will be able to compel Isaac to marry a non-Canaanite.¹⁴ The servant is unconvinced that he can successfully complete his task, and questions his master:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הַעֲבֹד אוֹלִי לֹא-תֵאבְּהָהּ הָאִשָּׁה לָלֶכֶת אַחֲרַי אֶל-הָאָרֶץ
הַזֹּאת הֲהִשָּׁב אֲשִׁיב אֶת-בְּנִי אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-יֵצֵאת מִשָּׁם:

And the servant said to him: "What if the woman does not consent to follow me to this land, shall I then take your son back to the land from which you came?" (Genesis 24:5)

Abraham makes an impassioned plea, one which Eleazar takes to heart in his negotiations, as we shall soon observe:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲבִרְהָם הִשְׁמַר לְךָ פֶּן-תִּשָּׁיב אֶת-בְּנִי שָׁמָּה יָדוּר אֱלֹהֵי
הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲשֶׁר לָקַחְנִי מִבֵּית אָבִי וּמֵאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתִּי וְאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר-לִי וְאֲשֶׁר
נִשְׁבַּע-לִי לֵאמֹר לְזֶרַעְךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת הוּא יִשְׁלַח מִלֵּאכֹו
לִפְנֶיךָ וּלְקַחַת אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי מִשָּׁם: וְאִם-לֹא תֵאבְּהָהּ הָאִשָּׁה לָלֶכֶת אַחֲרַיךָ
וְנָקִית מִשְׁבַּעְתִּי זֹאת רַק אֶת-בְּנִי לֹא תִשָּׁב שָׁמָּה:

Abraham answered him, "On no account must you take my son back there! The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from my native land, who promised me on oath, saying, 'I will assign this land to your offspring'--He will send His angel before you, and you will get a wife for my son from there. And if the woman does not consent to follow you, you shall then be clear of this oath to me; but do not take my son back there." (Genesis 24:6-8)

¹⁴ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit 1*, רעב.

Radak says that Abraham warns Eleazar not to return Isaac to the land of his father. Abraham and God made an agreement by which Abraham's descendants would inherit the land under the condition that they would live on the land, otherwise the agreement would be considered null and void. Eleazar, as the guardian of Abraham's interests, must insure that this does not transpire.¹⁵

◆ **ELEAZAR and LABAN**

Eleazar meets Rebekah and identifies her as the desired wife for Isaac. Consequently, Eleazar prepares to begin serious negotiations with Rebekah's kin in order to procure her for marriage to Isaac. Laban, Rebekah's brother, invites the stranger into the house warmly, invoking the name of God to show his respect for his customs and traditions.

וַיֹּאמֶר בּוֹא בְרוּךְ יְדוֹד לְמַה תַּעֲמִיד בַּחוּץ וְאֲנִי פְנִיתִי הַבַּיִת
וּמְקוֹם לְגַמְלִים:

"Come in, O blessed of the LORD," he said, "why do you remain outside, when I have made ready the house and a place for the camels?" (Genesis 24:31)

Radak comments that when he says בּוֹא בְרוּךְ יְדוֹד (come in, blessed of the Lord), he means that Laban has seen the wealth which the servant has brought with him and comments about it in order to flatter the stranger.¹⁶ We might understand this comment as a pre-negotiation tactic--flattery of the potential business partner, or just good manners in the ancient world. The servant comes into the house, establishes the fact that he is Abraham's

¹⁵*Torat Chaim, Bereshit 1, רעג.*

¹⁶*Torat Chaim, Bereshit 1, רפא.*

agent, and delivers a sales speech of sorts on behalf of his master

ויאמר עבד אברהם אנכי: וידוד ברך את-אדני מאד ויגדל ויתן-לו צאן ובקר וכסף וזהב ועבדים ושפחת ונמלים וחמרים: ותלד שרה אשת אדני בן לאדני אחרי זקנתה ויתן-לו את-כל-אשר-לו: וישבעני אדני לאמר לא-תקח אשה לבני מבנות הכנעני אשר אנכי ישב בארצו: אם-לא אל-בית-אבי תלך ואל-משפחתי ולקחת אשה לבני: ואמר אל-אדני אלי לא-תלך האשה אחרי: ויאמר אלי ידוד אשר-התהלכתי לפניו ישלח מלאכו אתך והצליח דרכך ולקחת אשה לבני ממשפחתי ומבית אבי אז תנקה מאלתי כי תבוא אל-משפחתי ואם-לא יתנו לך ידוד אלהי אדני אברהם אם-ישך-נא מצליח דרכי אשר אנכי הלך עליה: הנה אנכי נצב על-עין המים והיה העלמה היצאת לשאב ואמרתי אליה השקיני-נא מעט-מים מכדך: ואמרה אלי גם-אתה שתה וגם לגמליך אשאב הוא האשה אשר-הכיח ידוד לבן-אדני: אני טרם אכלה לדבר אל-לבי והנה רבקה יצאת וכדה על-שכמה ותרד העינה ותשאב ואמר אליה השקיני-נא: ותמהר ותורד כדה מעליה ותאמר שתה וגם-גמליך אשקה ואשת וגם הגמלים השקתה: ואשאל אתה ואמר בת-מי את ותאמר בת-בתואל בן-נחור אשר ילדה-לו מלכה ואשם הנזם על-אפה והצמידים על-ידיה: ואקד ואשתחוה לידוד ואברך את-ידוד אלהי אדני אברהם אשר הנחני בדרך אמת לקחת את-בת-אחי אדני לבנו: ועתה אם-ישכם עשים חסד ואמת את-אדני הגידו לי ואם-לא הגידו לי ואפנה על-ימין או על-שמאל:

"I am Abraham's servant," he began. The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become **rich**. He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and asses. And Sarah, my master's wife, bore my master a son in her old age, and he has **assigned to him everything he owns**. Now my master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites in whose land I dwell, but you shall go to my **father's house**, to my **kindred**, and get a wife for my son.' And I said to my master, 'What if the woman does not follow me?' He replied to me, 'The LORD, whose ways I have followed, will send His angel with you and make your errand successful; and you will get a wife for my son from my **kindred**, from my **father's house**. Thus only shall you be freed from my adjuration: if, **when you come to my kindred, they refuse you**--only then shall you be freed from my adjuration.' I came today to the spring, and I said: O LORD, **God of my master** Abraham, if You would indeed grant

success to the errand on which I am engaged! As I stand by the spring of water, let the young woman who comes out to draw and to whom I say, 'Please let me drink a little water from your jar,' and who answers, 'You may drink, and I will also draw for your camels'--let her be the wife whom the LORD has decreed for my master's son.' I had scarcely finished praying in my heart, when Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder and went down to the spring and drew. And I said to her, 'Please give me a drink.' She quickly lowered her jar and said, 'Drink,' and I will also water your camels.' So I drank, and she also watered the camels. I inquired of her, 'Whose daughter are you?' And she said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him. And I put the ring on her nose and the bands on her arms. Then I bowed low in homage to the LORD and blessed the LORD, the **God of my master Abraham, who led me on the right way** to get the daughter of my master's brother for his son. And now, if you mean to treat my master with true kindness, tell me, and if not, tell me also, that I may turn right or left.' (Genesis 24:34-49)

There are ten distinct speech-acts in verses 2-27, all of which are reiterated by Eleazar in this lengthy oration. The servant's commanding voice is all the more exceptional in light of his anonymity and his relative passivity. His speech is lengthy not in order to bring out *his* role in shaping events, but to illustrate that God has pointed everything toward Rebekah as the chosen woman.¹⁷ The servant achieves his goal by means of an assortment of subtle changes introduced into his retelling of the story in verses 34-49. He omits or de-emphasizes those components which might detract from the realization of his ultimate aim, while emphasizing other elements. The first act of the negotiation is to establish Abraham's wealth. The servant makes it clear that the material possessions that he has transported with him on this journey are a small parcel of what awaits for Rebekah if she joins Abraham's household. Rashbam remarks that the servant establishes Abraham's greatness to Laban: "And all the nobles wish to mate with his son [Abraham's son Isaac] but he [Abraham] does not want to [marry his

¹⁷ Savran 46.

beloved son to just anyone]”¹⁸ S’forno concurs, saying that there is no doubt that many in that country would have wanted to marry their daughters to Abraham’s son.¹⁹ The servant continues, and explains that Isaac will inherit all that Abraham possesses. Rashi elaborates, saying that Eleazar actually showed Laban the “deed of gift.” This shows Laban that Isaac is a financially secure potential husband for his sister.²⁰ The servant flatters the family by changing Abraham’s instructions to go to his birthplace--a physical place, instead, he uses the words **בית-אבי** (father’s house) and **משפחתי** (family), emphasizing familial and tribal connections. Additionally, he chooses to modify the descriptions of God in the re-telling of the event. Instead of calling God by the name that Abraham did, **השמים ואלהי הארץ** (God of heaven and God of earth) he refers to God as **אלהי אדני אברהם** (God of my master Abraham). No reference is made to God taking Abraham away from the land in which Laban sits, for this might insult him. Likewise, the special relationship shared by God and Abraham is downplayed, so that Laban does not think that a conspiracy has been formed against him. Furthermore, the servant does not tell Laban the entire truth when he recalls questioning Abraham, asking what he should do if the woman refuses to follow him back. Instead of saying that he would be absolved of his oath if the woman refused to follow him, he states that only if the family refused the offer would he be freed from this duty. He does not use the word oath, nor does he emphasize the negative connotations regarding Laban’s

¹⁸ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit* I, רפב.

¹⁹ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit* I, רפג.

²⁰ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit* I, רפג.

homeland. The final words that he says to him imply that although this match is desirable, there are other members of Abraham's family who exist in this land who surely would be delighted to find such a desirable catch. This sales tactic, the final words of the pitch, propel Rebekah's family to accept the proposal immediately. Eleazar succeeds in his mission--Laban agrees to the marriage, possibly a result of the servant's elocution.

Eleazar considers the sequence of events to be divinely navigated--at the well he himself heard Rebekah restate aloud and act according to the plan that he had silently ordained. Nor should we doubt the sincerity of his gratitude for God. But it is a much more laborious deed to convince those who stand outside the servant's consciousness of the inevitability of what transpired there. As narrator of the retelling, the servant controls the story, yet he must tell an account that "stresses both his own lack of force and God's controlling hand."²¹ It is not simply tact that influences the servant to eliminate Abraham's negative words about bringing Isaac back there; the servant must present an argument in which human choice (especially Abraham's) is minimized, though not altogether removed. But even as he emphasizes God's endorsement of Rebekah, Eleazar places final responsibility for the decision upon the family. And Rebekah's representatives respond accordingly, acknowledging the control of God in the matter, de-emphasizing their desire to profit from this exchange:

ויען לבן ובתואל ויאמרו מידוד יצא הדבר לא נוכל דבר אליך
רע או טוב: הנה רבקה לפניך קח ולך ותהי אשה לבן-אדניך
כאשר דבר ידוד;

²¹ W.M. Roth, "The Wooing of Rebecca," *CBQ* 34 (1972): 177-87.

Then Laban and Bethuel answered, "The matter was decreed by the LORD, we cannot speak to you bad or good. Here is Rebekah before you, take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master's son, as the LORD has spoken." (Genesis 24:50-51)

The servant assumes that he has concluded his negotiations. He has performed the formal necessities--eating and drinking with Laban and his kin in order to close the deal. He presumes that he may conclude this business trip and return home to his employer with his purchase. When he awakes the following morning, he begins to take leave of his host:

ויאכלו וישתו הוא והאנשים אשר-עמו וילינו ויקומו בבקר ויאמר שלחני לאדני:

"When they arose the next morning, he said, 'Give me leave to go to my master'" (Genesis 24:54). However, her mother and brother are not pleased about this plan of immediate departure. This was not a part of the negotiation--it was not implicitly expressed in the agreement. They wish to add new terms to this contract, stipulating some period of time before Rebekah may be taken away:

ויאמר אחיה ואמה תשב הנער אתנו ימים או עשור אחר תלך:

"But her brother and her mother said, 'Let the maiden remain with us some ten days then you may go'"²² (Genesis 24:55). Rashi comments that the mother and the brother received the presents offered to the family, and they now want to procure more money and/or gifts from him. He states: "If you want her now, then you must give us more."²³ But Abraham's servant reminds them that ultimately, the match was decreed by God, and that ultimately Eleazar did

²² This appears to be the *only* instance of a male and a female voice speaking in consort.

²³ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit* I, רפה.

not control the situation

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-תַּאֲחֵרוּ אֹתִי וַיְדוּר הַצֵּלִיחַ דְּרָכֵי שְׁלַחוֹנִי וְאַלֶּכָּה
לְאֹדְנִי.

"He said to them, 'Do not delay me, now that the LORD has made my errand successful. Give me leave that I may go to my master'" (Genesis 24:56). The mother and brother, not satisfied with his reply, decide to place the final decision in Rebekah's hands, perhaps assuming that she would elect to stay with her family rather than depart with a stranger.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ נִקְרָא לְנָעִר וְנִשְׁאַלָּהּ אֶת-פִּיהָ:

"And they said, 'Let us call the girl and ask for her reply'" (Genesis 24:57). Rebekah, as we have discussed in a previous chapter, does in fact agree to leave with the servant immediately. She changes her allegiance rather quickly, perhaps in part anticipating a better standard of living and a rise in her status as the wife of such a wealthy and desirable man. This does not imply that Rebekah is an opportunist--rather, she is a being a "responsible" biblical wife, yearning to meet her husband-to-be. Both Rebekah and her family make economic gains from these business negotiations about her "God-approved" marriage to Abraham's son Isaac.

♦ JACOB

While the biblical authors portray Abraham as a towering figure, almost inaccessible as a model in his relationship with God and his capability to hurdle every obstacle, placed in his path, Jacob as a young man is not portrayed favorably. He gets his brother's birthright through his exploitation of Esau's grief. Then, he swindles the patriarchal blessing by practicing deception on his blind and aged father. In both of these situations, the consequence

is lawful and irreversible²⁴ Jacob misrepresents himself to Isaac, and so too will his uncle exploit him further in the story. He took advantage of his father's permanent darkness to misrepresent himself as his elder brother, so Laban makes use of the darkness to substitute the elder sibling for the younger. Esau arrives after a difficult day in the field, and discovers his brother Jacob cooking an undisclosed red dish. Esau claims that he is starving, and asks Jacob if he may share in this sustenance.

ויאמר עשו אל-יעקב הלעיטני נא מן-האדם הזה כי עייף
אנכי על-כן קרא שמו אדום:

And Esau said to Jacob, "Give me some of that red stuff to gulp down, for I am famished"--which is why he was named Edom. (Genesis 25:30)

Jacob senses an opportunity to take advantage of his brother's anguish. He has a product that his brother desires, and because he has monopolized the market momentarily, he knows that he may demand a costly sum in return.

ויאמר יעקב מכרה כיום את-בכרתך לי:

"Jacob said, 'First sell me your birthright'" (Genesis 25:31). Note that Jacob does not ask Esau to "give" him the birthright. Rather, according to Rashbam, Jacob intends to make monetary payment for this right--but Esau must agree to the sale as the stipulation for partaking in the meal.

"First sell me your birthright" means "sell it to me immediately with my father's money that I will give to you, and only after that I will give you the food as witness and execution of the agreement between us." And Laban and

²⁴ Sarna, *Genesis JPS Commentary* 397.

Jacob ate to execute the agreement between them²⁵

Esau, in a state of desperation, accepts the terms

וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו הִנֵּה אֲנִכִּי הוֹלֵךְ לָמוֹת וְלָמָּה זֶה לִּי בְכֹרָה:

And Esau said, "I am at the point of death, so of what use is my birthright to me?" (Genesis 25:32)

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב הֲשִׁבְעָה לִּי כִּיּוֹם וַיִּשְׁבַּע לוֹ וַיִּמְכֹּר אֶת-בְּכֹרְתוֹ לַיֶּעֱקֹב:

"But Jacob said, 'Swear to me first.'" (Genesis 25:33) This oath is vital because, as noted by S'forno, "Jacob requests the oath because the property itself to be passed from Esau to Jacob is intangible. The oath replaces the intangible property, [that the end result will be] the price that Jacob paid was for the oath itself, representing the right of inheritance."²⁶ Ramban approaches the matter from a different perspective, and states that "the oath came after the sale, to establish that Esau will never appeal against the injustice of the sale."²⁷ This episode displays explicit business negotiations between the two brothers resulting in a successful bartering agreement.

♦ THE THIRD SISTER/WIFE EPISODE

This is the third and final sister/wife account in the Pentateuch. It is much less explicit than either of the first two accounts:

²⁵ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II, ח.*

²⁶ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II, ט.*

²⁷ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II, י.*

וישאלו אנשי המקום לאשתו ויאמר אחתי הוא כי ירא לאמר אשתי
פן-יחרגני אנשי המקום על-רבקה כי-טובת מראה היא.

When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he was afraid to say "my wife," thinking, "The men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful." (Genesis 26:7)

Once again, the ruling power calls for the husband and reprimands him for deceiving the leadership

ויקרא אבימלך ליצחק ויאמר אך הנה אשתך הוא ואיך אמרת
אחתי הוא ויאמר אליו יצחק כי אמרתי פן-אמות עליה: ויאמר
אבימלך מה-זאת עשית לנו כמעט שכב אחד העם את-אשתך
והבאת עלינו אשם:

Abimelech sent for Isaac and said, "So she is your wife! Why then did you say, 'She is my sister?'" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her." Abimelech said, "What have you done to us! One of the people might have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." (Genesis 26:9-10)

As in the first two incidents that have already been discussed, the controlling power calls the husband for a conference, asks for the reason behind the deception, and the husband gives a excuse for the falsehood. In this case, Isaac states simply that he thought he would die otherwise. He does not make the elaborate excuses that Abraham made in the previous account. However, as in the case with Abraham, this incident opens the lines of communication between the king and the resident alien. Abimelech declares an edit of protection for Isaac and Rebekah:

ויצו אבימלך את-כל-העם לאמר הנגע באיש הזה ובאשתו מות יומת:

Abimelech then charged all the people, saying, "Anyone who molests this man or his wife shall be put to death." (Genesis 26:11)

Isaac settles in the land, and he becomes very wealthy. He became more prosperous than the Philistines inhabitants in the land, and their jealousy overtook them. They filled the wells that Abraham's servants dug so that they were no longer functional. The king finally told Isaac that his presence was a menace to the community.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִימֶלֶךְ אֶל-יִצְחָק לֵךְ מֵעִמָּנוּ כִּי-עֲצַמְתָּ-מִּמָּנוּ מְאֹד:

And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you have become far too big for us" (Genesis 26:16)

Isaac leaves, and establishes himself in the wadi of Gerar, and digs new wells. However, the Philistines do not allow him to live peacefully--they claim rights to the water that Isaac finds. After much digging and much turmoil, Isaac finally digs a well which does not cause territorial concerns, and he begins to prosper once again. He goes to Beer-sheba and God speaks to him, reiterating the promises made to his father Abraham. Suddenly, Abimelech reappears in the dialogue--although Isaac is not terribly pleased to see him.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִצְחָק מְדוּעַ בָּאתֶם אֵלַי וְאַתֶּם שֹׂנְאִים אֹתִי וְתִשְׁלַחוּנִי מֵאַתְכֶּם:

Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you have been hostile to me and have driven me away from you?" (Genesis 26:27)

As in the case with his father Abraham, Abimelech realizes that Isaac is a valuable contact and should not have been alienated. He attempts to reconcile and make a pact with Isaac, who is now known to have a special connection with God:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ רְאוּ רָאִינוּ כִּי-חֵידוּ יְדֹדְךָ וְנֹאמַר תְּהִי נָא אֱלֹהֵי בִינֹתֵינוּ
בִּינֵינוּ וּבִינְךָ וְנִכְרַתָּה בְרִית עִמָּךְ: אִם-תַּעֲשֶׂה עִמָּנוּ רָעָה כְּאֲשֶׁר לֹא
נִגְעָנוּךְ וְכְאֲשֶׁר עֲשִׂינוּ עִמָּךְ-רָק-טוֹב וְנִשְׁלַחְךָ בְּשָׁלוֹם אַתָּה עֵתָה בָּרוּךְ
יְדֹד: וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְׁתֶּה וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ:

And they said, "We now see plainly that the LORD has been with you, and we thought. Let there be a sworn treaty between our two parties, between you and us. Let us make a pact with you that you will not do us harm, just as we have not molested you but have always dealt kindly with you and sent you away in peace. From now on, be you blessed of the LORD!" (Genesis 26:28-30)

Rashbam refers to the treaty between Abraham and Abimelech that we have already mentioned in this chapter, and says that the treaty made with Isaac is not a new treaty, but a reaffirmation of the first treaty that was intended to bind three generations.²⁸ Conversely, Ramban interprets this as a new treaty. He says,

It does not seem that the king of the Philistines was afraid of Isaac engaging in war with him, because Abraham promised not to engage in war with kith and kin, but now the king of the Philistines said to himself, "because we have now breached a treaty by sending him away, he will also breach the treaty with us, and send us and our seed away from the land." Therefore, they made a new treaty."²⁹

They ate and drank, sealing the treaty/contract that had been made between them.

♦ ISAAC and HIS SONS

The story of Isaac and the imparting of his blessings to his sons is a marvelous story with which to discuss the issue of direct discourse. We will find that the differences in speech patterns between the two sons plays an essential role in the development of the plot. Isaac called his elder son Esau to him and said:

ויהי כִּי-זָקֵן יִצְחָק וְתַכְחִין עֵינָיו מֵרָאִת וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-עֶשָׂו בְּנוֹ הַגָּדֹל
וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בְּנִי וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הֲנִנִּי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה-נָא זָקֵנְתִּי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי

²⁸ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II*, יט.

²⁹ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II*, כ.

יום מותי: ועתה שא-נא כליך תליך וקשתך וצא השדה וצודה לי
צודה ציד: ועשה-לי מטעמים כאשר אהבתי והביאה לי ואכלה
בעבור תברכך נפשי בטרם אמות.

When Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, he called his older son Esau and said to him, "My son." He answered, "Here I am." And he said, "I am old now, and I do not know how soon I may die. Take your gear, your quiver, and bow, and go out into the open and hunt me some game. Then prepare a dish for me such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my innermost blessing before I die." (Genesis 27:1-4)

Heskoni says that the phrase **לא ידעתי יום מותי** ("I do not know when I will die")

means:

... if I die, you will lose all of the wealth and power of the first born because you have sold your inheritance rights. Therefore, I wish to preempt that and give you everything as a gift while I am alive, and therefore Jacob may not take it away from you because it was not passed down as inheritance, but given as a gift while I was alive.³⁰

This is a business transaction. Isaac tries to avoid the consequences of the agreement between Esau and Jacob by transferring all of the assets that were promised to Jacob through inheritance to Esau at the present time. However, through Rebekah, Jacob manages to counter-maneuver: his mother prepares the food in advance of Esau's return and dresses Jacob in Esau's clothes. Jacob approaches his father to receive this blessing:

ויבא אל-אביו ויאמר אבי ויאמר הנני מי אתה בני:

He went to his father and said, "Father." And he said, "Yes, which of my sons are you?" (Genesis 27:18)

Jacob greets his father and Isaac responds in turn with a question. Radak says that Isaac had

³⁰ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II, כב.*

doubts about the voice--he could not tell which one of his sons addressed him.³¹ Jacob readdresses his father and expressly lies to him

ויאמר יעקב אל-אביו אנכי עשו בכרך עשיתי כאשר דברת אלי
קום-נא שבה ואכלה מצידך בעבור תברכני נפשך

Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau, your first born, I have done as you have told me. Pray sit up and eat of my game, that you may give me your innermost blessing (Genesis 27:19)

He paraphrases what his father has already told his brother, in order to establish his identity as Esau.

ויאמר יצחק אל-בנו מה-זה מהרת למצא בני:

"Isaac said to his son, 'How did you succeed so quickly, my son?'" (Genesis 27:20). Jacob's intent was to arrive before his brother could complete his task. Apparently, his arrival was noticeably premature, for it is the first thing that his father questions. Jacob quickly answers, attributing the speedy arrival to God--the God of his father:

ויאמר כי הקרה ידוד אלהיך לפני:

"And he said, 'Because the LORD your God granted me good fortune'" (Genesis 27:20). Basically, he is flattering his father, making every effort to receive the valuable blessing that his father will impart. Rashi says that when the narrator says that "the voice is the voice of Jacob" in verse 22, it means that it is the speech pattern of Jacob--flattery--which Esau does not use in his normal speech.³² Therefore, Isaac is not satisfied with the answer, he asks Jacob

³¹ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II, כו.*

³² *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II, כז.*

to approach him in order to validate the identity of his son

ויאמר יצחק אל-יעקב גשה-נא ואמשך בנך האתה זה בני עשו
אם-לא ויגש אל-יצחק אביו וימשהו ויאמר הקל קול יעקב והיה
יעקב ידי עשו.

Isaac said to Jacob, "Come closer that I may feel you, my son--whether you are really my son Esau or not." "The voice is the voice of Jacob, yet the hands are the hands of Esau" (Genesis 27:21-22)

Isaac makes one more attempt to insure the identity of the receiver. However, he never is truly convinced. He never fully states that this is without a doubt his older son that stood in front of him. Isaac questions him a third and final time before beginning the formal exchange.

ויאמר הגשה לי ואכלה מציד בני למען תברכך נפשי ויגש-לו
ויאכל ויבא לו יין וישת:

He asked, "Are you really my son Esau?" And when he said, "I am," he said, "Serve me and let me eat of my son's game so that I may give you my innermost blessing." (Genesis 27:25)

After he concludes that the chances are likely that this is Esau, he begins the proceedings by calling for the serving of his son's game. Finally, Isaac is prepared to bless his son--hoping to break the first contract that Esau made with Jacob. He tell him to draw closer to him.

ויאמר אליו יצחק אביו גשה-נא ושקה-לי בני:

"Then his father Isaac said to him, 'Come close and kiss me, my son'" (Genesis 27:27). Radak comments that "This is a show of superiority because in all cases does the inferior kiss the superior, or if they are equal, the narrator says that they kissed each other."³³ Therefore, the kiss is a show of power and position. Isaac blesses his son, Jacob leaves, and the real Esau

³³*Torat Chaim, Bereshit II, כח.*

approaches his father moments later--the "rightful" party

ויעש גם-הוא מטעמים ויבא לאביו ויאמר לאביו יקם אבי
ויאכל מציד בנו בעבור תברכני נפשך:

And he said to his father, "Let my father sit up and eat of his son's game so that you may give me your innermost blessing." (Genesis 27:31)

Isaac is surprised, and alarmed. He suddenly realizes the possibility that he might have been out-maneuvered. He asks for the identity of the man standing before him.

ויאמר לו יצחק אביו מי-אתה ויאמר אני בנך בכרך עשו:

His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" And he said, "I am your son, Esau, your first born!" (Genesis 27:32)

This was not the information that Isaac expected to hear. Radak and Rambam concur that this expression of surprise and fear is for Esau's benefit, because Isaac does not want him to think that this was planned. He continued his elocution:

ויחרד יצחק חרדה גדלה עד-מאד ויאמר מי-אפוא הוא הצד-ציד
ויבא לי ואכל מכל בטרם תבוא ואברכהו גם-ברוך יהיה:

"Who was it, then," he demanded, "that hunted game and brought it to me? Moreover, I ate of it before you came, and I blessed him; now he must remain blessed!" (Genesis 27:33)

This question is rhetorical--How could Esau know who this imposter was, any more than his father? In fact, it will be Isaac who identifies the imposter in verse 35. Esau hears his father's tone and knows that he is not in a good position. Once a blessing is articulated, it is proclaimed and may not be revoked. Esau is quite aware of this, as he makes his next plea:

כשמע עשו את-דברי אביו ויצעק צעקה גדלה ומרה עד-מאד
ויאמר לאביו ברכני גם-אני אבי:

When Esau heard his father's words, he burst into wild and bitter sobbing, and said to his father, "Bless me too Father!" (Genesis 27:34)

But Esau knows that this is impossible--at least the blessing that has imparted cannot be re-consigned. Radak says that Esau tries to salvage the situation from becoming a complete disaster, by asking to get Jacob's blessing--the blessing intended for the younger son. Instead of receiving nothing at all, at least he should receive a small portion.³⁴ But Isaac responds to the simple meaning of the text, telling his son that he cannot give the same blessing twice:

ויאמר בא אחיך במרמה ויקח ברכתך:

"But he answered, 'Your brother came with guile and took away your blessing'" (Genesis 27:35). Isaac implicates the younger brother Jacob in this act of deception and fraud. Esau continues his enraged ranting:

ויאמר הכי קרא שמו יעקב ויעקבני זה פעמים את-בכרתי לקח
והנה עתה לקח ברכתי ויאמר הלא-אצלתי לי ברכה:

[Esau] said, "Was he, then, named Jacob that he might supplant me these two times? First he took away my birthright and now he has taken away my blessing!" And he added, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" (Genesis 27:36)

A good businessman would never give away all of his assets to insure one deal. Surely Isaac must have some assets on reserve that he might liquidate and pass on to his deserving son. Isaac responds to his son--not in the way that Esau intended:

³⁴ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit* II, לא.

ויען יצחק ויאמר לעשו הן גביר שמתיו לך ואת-כל-אחיו נתתי
לו לעבדים ודגן ותירש סמכתיו ולכה אפוא מה אעשה בני:

Isaac answered, saying to Esau, "But I have made him master over you: I have given him all his brothers for servants, and sustained him with grain and wine. What, then, can I still do for you, my son?" (Genesis 27:37)

Rashi interprets Isaac's words in the following manner: "What is the use of any blessing that I would give to you, because I put him [Jacob] as master over you, and if you get any assets, they will become his." If the servant receives anything, it actually belongs to the master.³⁵ Therefore, there is no reason to waste a blessing that could never be actualized. But Esau does not accept this answer, and pleads once again:

ויאמר עשו אל-אביו הברכה אחת הוא-לך אבי ברכני גם-אני
אבי וישא עשו קלו ויבך:

And Esau said to his father, "Have you but one blessing, Father? Bless me too, Father!" And Esau wept aloud. (Genesis 27:38)

Esau is unwilling to accept his status. Radak says that Esau still tries to salvage something by asking Isaac to bless him with *anything* that he has not already given to Jacob.³⁶ Isaac does find something, although not at all what Esau might have liked. Therefore, Jacob succeeded in usurping his brother's status and material possessions, and makes his name in the biblical world as a shrewd and cunning businessman. However, as we shall see in the up and coming episode of Jacob, Jacob does not always fare well. In his immediate family, he was the most astute in business dealings. However, when he ventured into the world--leaving his immediate

³⁵ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit* II, לב.

³⁶ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit* II, לב.

family--and faced real business players, he found himself quite lacking in certain skills that might have assisted him greatly

♦ LABAN and JACOB

Jacob arrives at his Uncle Laban's house, and Laban greets him warmly. Jacob proceeds to tell Laban all that has happened to him, including the fact that he has inherited both the present and inheritance rights of his father.³⁷ Laban proclaims that they are unquestionably family:

ויאמר לו לבן אך עצמי ובשרי אתה וישב עמו חדש ימים: ויאמר לבן ליעקב הכי אחי אתה ועבדתני חנם הגידה לי מה-משכרתך:

And Laban said to him, "You are truly my bone and flesh." When he had stayed with him a month's time, Laban said to Jacob, "Just because you are a kinsman, should you serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" (Genesis 29:14-15)

Laban recognizes that Jacob is a valuable asset, and he would like to encourage him to remain on Laban's household staff. Instead of asking for monetary compensation, Jacob asks for a different type of compensation:

ויאהב יעקב את-רחל ויאמר אעבדך שבע שנים ברחל בתך הקטנה:

Jacob loved Rachel; so he answered, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." (Genesis 29:18)

³⁷ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit* II, נב.

Jacob makes his offer--seven years of service for Rachel. Jacob does not only say Rachel, he defines her as בתך הקטנה (your younger daughter) because, according to Rashi, Jacob knew that Laban was a swindler, and did not want to make any part of the agreement ambiguous. He did not want to leave any term open to interpretation. Laban agrees to the terms stated by his nephew.

ויאמר לבן טוב תתי אתה לך מתתי אתה לאיש אחר שבה עמדי:

Laban said, "Better that I give her to you than that I should give her to an outsider. Stay with me." (Genesis 29:19)

However, he does so in a dubious manner. Laban does not make a straightforward acceptance. He never clarifies the term of the contract nor the wages. He makes a verbal agreement with no witnesses. Laban does not make an expressed promise to give Rachel. When the seven years passed, Jacob approached Laban and tells him that he has performed his part of the contract, and now wishes Laban to perform his part.

ויאמר יעקב אל-לבן הבה את-אשתי כי מלאו ימי ואבואה אליה:

"Then Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife, for my time is fulfilled, that I may co-habitate with her'" (Genesis 29:21). Laban agrees, prepares a feast and creates the illusion that Jacob marries Rachel. However, Jacob soon realizes that he has been tricked into marrying Rachel's older sister Leah. Laban has breeched his part of the contract, and Jacob reproves Laban for his actions:

ויחי בבקר והנה-הוא לאה ויאמר אל-לבן מה-זאת עשית לי הלא ברחל עבדתי עמך ולמה רמיתני:

"So he said to Laban, 'What is this you have done to me? I was in your service for Rachel!'

Why did you deceive me?" (Genesis 29:25). When Jacob admonishes Laban with the accusatory words of this verse, he echos the same verb root used about himself by Isaac to Esau (27:35). In this case the biblical author has Jacob ask why Laban "רמיתני" ("deceived me") while in the previous section, Isaac tells Esau that Jacob has stolen his blessing במרמה ("with guile") showing a close connection between the actions of the former to the later. Laban claims that this was the actual contract. He makes no admission of guilt or wrong-doing. He does, however, offer an explanation:

וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לֹא-יַעֲשֶׂה כֵן בְּמִקְוָמֵנוּ לַתּוֹת הַצְעִירָה לִפְנֵי הַבְּכִירָה:
מִלֹּא שֶׁבַע זֹאת וְנָתַנָּה לָךְ גַּם-אֶת-זֹאת בַּעֲבֹדָה אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲבֹד עִמָּדִי
עוֹד שֶׁבַע-שָׁנִים אַחֲרָיוֹת:

Laban said, "It is not in our practice in our place to marry off the younger before the older. Wait until the bridal week of this one is over and we will give you that one too, provided you serve me another seven years." (Genesis 29:26-27)

Radak remarks that Laban has an explanation for his actions. He attempts to claim that due to the fact that it is their custom to marry the elder daughter before marrying the younger one, he always intended to give his older daughter first, no matter what Jacob stipulated. Laban contends that Jacob should have understood this element of their culture. Laban compromises, offering Jacob his younger daughter immediately *before* fulfilling an another seven years of service. Heskoni emphasizes the fact that Laban makes this offer in the plural רַבָּנָה לָךְ (and we will give you) because he knows that Jacob no longer trusts him, and Laban therefore provides witnesses who can attest to the validity of the contract. Jacob makes no verbal agreement to this offer. We know that he accepted the offer, but only from

the narrator.

Seven years pass, Jacob fulfills his contract with Laban, and wishes to leave with his wives, children, and property. He goes to Laban and tells him of his intentions to leave his employ:

ויהי כאשר ילדה רחל את-יוסף ויאמר יעקב אל-לבן שלחני
ואלכה אל-מקומי ולארצי:

After Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Give me leave to go back to my own homeland. Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served you, that I may go, for well you know what services I have rendered you." (Genesis 30:25)

It is peculiar that Jacob would ask Laban for his wives and his children, since he had already fulfilled his contracts for his wives, and his children never belonged to Laban in the first place. Radak says that Jacob asks for these possessions that belong to him already because he is still in Laban's house, and everything that belongs to him inadvertently belongs to Laban.³⁸ But Laban is not prepared to let him go. He begins to flatter Jacob and to find some way to entice him to remain in the household a while longer:

ויאמר אליו לבן אם-נא מצאתי חן בעיניך נחשתי ויברכני
ידוד בגללך: ויאמר נקבה שכרך עלי ואתנה:

But Laban said to him, 'If you will indulge me, I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me on your account.' And he continued, 'Name the wages due from me, and I will pay you.'" (Genesis 30:27-8)

³⁸ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II*, סה.

Laban realizes that it is time for contract re-negotiations. He tells Jacob to name the price that it would require for him to stay. Jacob seems to have thought about this matter--he begins the negotiations by reminding his employer how much he has prospered since Jacob's arrival, and hinted that he needed to start thinking about the future, for himself and for his family:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ אֵת אֲשֶׁר עָבַדְתִּיךָ וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר-חָיָה מִקֶּנְךָ אֵתִי
כִּי מַעֲטָא אֲשֶׁר-חָיָה לְךָ לִפְנֵי וַיִּפְרֹץ לְרֹב וַיְבַרֵךְ יְדוּד אֶתְךָ לְרִגְלִי
וְעַתָּה מַתִּי אַעֲשֶׂה גַם-אֲנֹכִי לְבֵיתִי:

But he said, 'You know well how I have served you and how your livestock has fared with me. For the little you had before I came has grown to much, since the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. And now, when shall I make provisions for my own household?' (Genesis 30:29-30).

Jacob clearly makes his point--it is evident that the price Laban will pay for Jacob to continue their business relationship will be a costly one.

וַיֹּאמֶר מַה אֶתֶן-לְךָ וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב לֹא-תֶתֶן-לִי מְאוֹמָה אִם-תַּעֲשֶׂה-לִּי
חֹדֶר הַזֶּה אֲשׁוּבָה אֶרְעָה צֹאנְךָ אֲשֶׁמֶר: אַעֲבֹר בְּכָל-צֹאנְךָ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
מִשֶּׁם כָּל-שֶׁה נִקְדָּה וְטָלוּא וְכָל-שֶׁה-חֹם בְּכַשְׂבִּים וְטָלוּא וְנִקְדָּה בְּעִזִּים
וְהָיָה שְׂכָרִי: וְעַתָּה-בִּי צִדְקָתִי בֵּין מַחֲר-כִּי-תָבוֹא עַל-שְׂכָרִי לִפְנֵיךָ
כָּל אֲשֶׁר-אֵינְנוּ נִקְדָּה וְטָלוּא בְּעִזִּים וְחֹם בְּכַשְׂבִּים גָּנוּב הוּא אֵתִי:

He said, "What shall I pay you?" And Jacob said, "Pay me nothing! If you will do this thing for me, I will again pasture and keep your flocks: let me pass through your whole flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted animal--every dark colored sheep and every spotted and speckled goat. Such shall be my wages. In the future when you go over my wages, let my honesty toward you testify for me: if there are among my goats any that are not speckled or spotted or any sheep that are not dark-colored, they got there by theft." (Genesis 30:31-33)

Jacob states his plan clearly, leaving little room for interpretation. The terms are simple: Jacob will take a certain percentage of the flocks that he cultivated and maintained during his

employment. He has chosen a certain type of animal--one with easily identifiable markings. If there are any goats or sheep that do not fit the patterns that he has described, Laban will know that they are stolen from his own flocks. Additionally, Jacob can be assured that Laban cannot steal from *his* flocks--and since he has already been duped by his uncle in the past, he might have been cautious about his dealings with this man

ויאמר לבן הן לו יהי כדברך:

"And Laban said, 'Very well, let it be as you say'" (Genesis 30:34). This time, Laban gives a verbal response to Jacob's proposal. Jacob continues to work for Laban for several years, and finally decides that it is now time to go back to his homeland. He informs Leah and Rachel of his decision, and they agree to depart with him. However, due to the fact that the last two times he attempted to leave Laban's household failed, Jacob decides to exit quickly and quietly in the middle of the night without telling his father-in-law of his intentions. After Laban arises and realizes that Jacob et. al. have vanished from the abode, he pursues them, and eventually overtakes the entourage. He addresses Jacob:

ויאמר לבן ליעקב מה עשית ותגנב את-לבבי ותנהג את-בנותי כשביות חרב: למה נחבאת לברח ותגנב אתי ולא-הגדת לי ואשלחך בשמחה ובשרים בתך ובכנור: ולא נטשתני לנשק לבני ולבנותי עתה הסכלת עש: יש-לא ל ידי לעשות עמכם רע ואלהי אביכם אמש אמר אלי לאמר השמר לך מדבר עם-יעקב מטוב עד-רע: ועתה הלך הלכת כי-נכסף נכספתה לבית אביך למה גנבת את-אלהי:

And Laban said to Jacob, "What did you mean by keeping me in the dark and carrying off my daughters like captives of the sword? Why did you flee in secrecy and mislead me and not tell me? I would have sent you off with festive music, with timbrel and lyre. You did not even let me kiss my sons and daughters good-by! It was a foolish thing for you to do. I have it in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father said to me last night, 'Beware of

attempting anything with Jacob, good or bad. Very well, you had to leave because you were longing for your father's house, but why did you steal my gods?" (Genesis 31:26-30)

Contracts have two types of terms--expressed terms (those that are written out formally) and implied terms (those which are assumed--common sense terms). Unlike like the other two "contracts" that Laban and Jacob agreed upon, this one had no set time period. Therefore, Jacob was under no obligation to remain with Laban for a definite period of time. However, one may assume that he was under obligation to give reasonable notice before terminating the business relationship. He chooses not to give notice. Just as Laban seemed to have valid reasons *some* for his distress regarding the sudden departure, Jacob clearly has his own reason for wanting to make a quiet withdrawal:

ויען יעקב ויאמר ללבן כי יראתי כי אמרתי פן-תגזל את-בנותיך
מעמי: עם אשר תמצא את-אלהיך לא יחיה נגד אחינו הכר-לך מה
עמדי וקח-לך ולא-ידע יעקב כי רחל גנבתם:

Jacob answered Laban, saying, "I was afraid because I thought you would take your daughters from me by force. But anyone with whom you find your gods shall not remain alive! In the presence of our kinsmen, point out what I have of yours and take it." (Genesis 31:31-32)

Jacob is quite concerned about the missing idols, and makes provisions for their return. In the presence of witnesses he states that anything which does not legally belong to Jacob will be returned to Laban. Laban and his entourage search the entire convoy and find nothing. Jacob is incensed, and allows twenty years of frustrations of working for an insatiable and swindling supervisor vent out:

ויחר ליעקב וירב בלבן ויען יעקב ויאמר ללבן מה-פשעי מה
חטאתי כי דלקת אחרי: כי-מששת אתכל-כלי מה-מצאת מכל

כלי-ביתך שים כה נגד אחי ואחייך ויוכיחו בין שנינו: זה עשרים שנה אנכי עמך רחלך ועוזך לא שכלו ואילי צאנך לא אכלתי: טרפה לא-הבאתי אליך אנכי אחטנה מידי תבקשנה נגבתי יום וגנבתי לילה: הייתי ביום אכלני חרב וקרר כלילה ותדר שנתי מעיני זה-לי עשרים שנה בביתך עבדתך ארבע-עשרה שנה בשתי בנותיך ושש שנים בצאנך ותחלף את-משכרתי עשרת מנים: לולי אלהי אבי אלהי אברהם ופחד יצחק היה לי כי עתה ריקם שלחתני את-עניי ואת-יגיע כפי ראה אלהים ויוכח אמש:

Jacob spoke up and said to Laban, "What is my crime, what is my guilt that you should pursue me? You rummaged through all my things, what have you found of all your household objects? Set it here, before my kinsmen and yours, and let them decide between us two. These twenty years I have spent in your service, your ewes and she-goats never miscarried, nor did I feast on rams from your flock. That which was torn by beasts I never brought to you, I myself made good the loss, you exacted it of me, whether snatched by day or snatched by night. Often, scorching heat ravaged me by day and frost by night; and sleep fled from my eyes. Of the twenty years that I spent in your household, I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flocks; and you changed my wages time and again. Had not the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, been with me, you would have sent me away empty-handed. But God took notice of my plight and the toil of my hands, and He gave judgement last night." (Genesis 31:36-42)

Jacob never voiced many of these complaints before. The reader had no previous knowledge from Jacob that his work was difficult. In fact, the narrator makes it clear that the first seven years of servitude seemed as if they were only days for Jacob, because of his love for Rachel. Yet his disdain for Laban is unmistakable. This time, Laban does not ask him to return, nor does Jacob negotiate. Laban says that he has the power to hurt Jacob, but because of God's intervention, Jacob will remain untouched--an unverifiable moment of speech, thereby holding little value to Jacob. This moment signifies the end of a mediocre employment situation. Laban has no power over his former employee, and Jacob has little to lose from speaking out.

ויען לבן ויאמר אל-יעקב הבנות בנותי והבנים בני והצאן צאני
וכל אשר-אתה ראה לי-הוא ולבנותי מה-אעשה לאלה היום או
לבניהן אשר ילדו: ועתה לכה נכרתה ברית אני ואתה והיה
לעד ביני ובינך: ויקח יעקב אבן וירימה מצבה:

Then Laban spoke up and said to Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, all that you see is mine. Yet what can I do now about my daughters and the children they have borne? Come, then, let us make a pact, you and I, that there may be a witness between you and me" (Genesis 31:43-45)

We may infer from this statement that Laban understands that this relationship is truly drawing to a close. He initiates an official end to their relationship--both business and personal. He orders his servants to prepare for some type of ceremony:

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב לְאֶחָיו לָקְטוּ אֲבָנִים וַיִּקְחוּ אֲבָנִים וַיַּעֲשׂוּ-גֹל וַיֹּאכְלוּ
שֶׁם-עַל-הַגֹּל:

"And Jacob said to his kinsmen, 'Gather stones'" (Genesis 31:46). They gather these stones, and Laban builds a structure that will serve two purposes: as a reminder that Jacob should treat his wives with respect and not take any other wives in the future, and as a divider that will forever separate Laban and his family from Laban and his household:

וַיִּקְרָא-לוֹ לְבֶן יִגָּר שֶׁהָיוּ וַיַּעֲקֹב קָרָא לוֹ גִּלְעָד: וַיֹּאמֶר לְבֶן הַגֹּל
הַזֶּה עַד בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ הַיּוֹם עַל-כֵּן קָרָא-שְׁמוֹ גִּלְעָד: וְהַמִּצְפָּה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר
וְאִם-תִּקַּח נָשִׁים עַל-בָּנָתִי אֵין אִישׁ עִמָּנוּ רֹאֵה אֱלֹהִים עַד בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ:
וַיֹּאמֶר לְבֶן לִיעֲקֹב הִנֵּה הַגֹּל הַזֶּה וְהִנֵּה הַמִּצְבָּה אֲשֶׁר יִרְיֵתִי בֵּינִי
וּבֵינְךָ: עַד הַגֹּל הַזֶּה וְעַד הַמִּצְבָּה אִם-אֲנִי לֹא-אֶעְבֵּר אֶלֶיךָ אֶת-הַגֹּל
הַזֶּה וְאִם-אֶתָּה לֹא-תֵעְבֵּר אֵלַי אֶת-הַגֹּל הַזֶּה וְאֶת-הַמִּצְבָּה הַזֹּאת
לְרַעַח: אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹרָתָם וְאֱלֹהֵי נַחֲוֹר יִשְׁפְּטוּ בֵּינֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיהֶם
וַיִּשְׁבַּע יַעֲקֹב בַּפֹּחַד אֲבִירֵי יִצְחָק:

And Laban declared, "This mound is a witness between you and me this day....may the Lord watch between you and me, when we are out of sight of

each other. If you ill-treat my daughters or take other wives besides my daughters--though no one else be about, remember, God Himself will be witness between you and me." And Laban said to Jacob, "Here is this mound and here the pillar which I have set up between you and me. this mound shall be witness and this pillar shall be witness that I am not to cross to you past this mound, and that you are not to cross to me past this mound and this pillar, with hostile intent. May the God of Abraham and the god of Nahor"--their ancestral deities--"judge between us." (Genesis 31:47-53)

Jacob and Laban part--Laban returns home to his family and flocks and Jacob continues to his father's land--dissolving their business relationship and all economic ties forever.

♦ JACOB and ESAU: REVISITED

Jacob prepares to return to his father's homeland and to his brother, who conceivably could still be furious with him for the antics that occurred twenty years prior. Furthermore, Jacob has no idea whether or not his brother has prospered in his absence. Surely, according to Isaac's blessings, Jacob was destined to surpass Esau in every measure. Jacob struggled, negotiated, and toiled for his wealth and success, and was eager to protect that which he could. Therefore, Jacob develops a plan of defense that he anticipates will pacify Esau if necessary. He organizes his troops and his possessions carefully:

ויצו אתם לאמר כה תאמרון לאדני לעשו כה אמר עבדך יעקב
עם-לבן גרתי ואחר עד-עתה: ויהי-לי שור וחמור צאן ועבד ושפחה
ואשלח להגיד לאדני למצא-חן בעיניך:

Thus shall you say, "To my lord Esau, thus says your servant Jacob: I stayed with Laban and remained until now. I have acquired cattle, asses, sheep, and male and female slaves; and I send this message to my lord in the hope of gaining your favor." (Genesis 32:5-6)

His message is remarkably modest and unassuming. He does not wish to arouse his brother's

jealously about his great success. He does not mention the great wealth that he has amassed, only that he has acquired a fair amount of property. The messengers return with a surprising reply:

וישבו המלאכים אל-יעקב לאמר באנו אל-אחידך אל-עשו וגם
הלך לקראתך וארבע-מאות איש עמו.

The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau; he himself is coming to meet you; and there are four hundred men with him."
(Genesis 32:7)

Jacob may only assume that this is not a positive response. The sheer number of men that are coming to greet him suggest that an army is approaching. It is highly doubtful that such a large group would come to meet him for positive purposes. Therefore, Jacob further develops his defense plans:

ויצו את-הראשון לאמר כי יפגשך עשו אחי ושאלך לאמר
למי-אתה ואנה תלך ולמי אלה לפניך: ואמרת לעבדך ליעקב
מנחה הוא שלוחה לאדני לעשו והנה גם-הוא אחרינו.

He instructed the one in front as follows, "When my brother Esau meets you and asks, 'Whose man are you? Where are you going?' you shall answer, 'Your servant Jacob's, they are a gift sent to my lord Esau; and [Jacob] himself is right behind us.'" (Genesis 32:18-19)

Jacob must make Esau understand that he means no harm, and that he wants nothing more than to arrive in this land in peace, and to reconcile with his estranged brother. Therefore, he orders his servants to be acquiescent, and that their most important responsibility is to pacify Esau. Heskonl remarks that Jacob makes every effort to pacify him--but he is cautious. He does not go to meet his brother without knowing his brother's disposition. Therefore, he sends the servants in front of him, so that they might pacify Esau with offerings, and to

calculate Esau's current temperament (and to inform their master). Furthermore, he instructs the servants to explain to Esau the reason that his younger brother does not rush to meet him, rather, he sends others before him.³⁹ Although no formal pact will be formed between the two men, there is a tacit understanding that it is upon Jacob to make peace with his brother. The following day, when Jacob arrives with his family, Esau greets him with camaraderie and asks him to identify the people who travel with him:

וישא את-עיניו וירא את-הנשים ואת-הילדים ויאמר מי-אלה
לך ויאמר הילדים אשר-חנן אלהים את-עבדך.

Looking about, he saw the women and the children. "Who," he asked, "are these with you?" He answered, "The children with whom God has favored your servant." (Genesis 33:5)

Note that Jacob continually calls himself עבדך (your servant) or as in the following passage אדני (my lord). He makes every effort to express to Esau that he is willing to be subservient to him. Jacob insinuates that the blessings which he stole is meaningless, and that Esau is the master of the land. He does not wish to upset the hierarchal structure in this new territory. Esau asks about the sizable entourage of people and possessions that arrive with Jacob:

ויאמר מי לך כל-המחנה הזה אשר פנשתי ויאמר למצא-חן
בעיני אדני.

And he asked, "What do you mean by all this company which I have met?" He answered, "To gain my lord's favor." (Genesis 33:8)

Jacob flatters Esau with his answer. He has learned through his experiences with Laban that

³⁹ *Torat Chaim*, Bereshit II, צט.

adoration can distract the human thought process in a way that benefits the flatterer more than the recipient of such flattery. Jacob appears willing to impart his material possessions for fraternal peace in this case. But this might not be necessary, for Esau strives to decline the offering:

ויאמר עשו יש-לי רב אחי יחי לך אשר-לך:

"Esau said, 'I have enough, my brother; let what you have remain yours' (Genesis 33:9).

However, Jacob insists that Esau must accept this gift:

ויאמר יעקב אל-נא אם-נא מצאתי חן בעיניך ולקחת מנחתי מירי
כי על-כן ראיתי פניך כראת פני אלהים ותרחמיני: קח-נא את-ברכתי
אשר הבאת לך כי-חנני אלהים וכי יש-לי כל ויפצר-בו ויקח:

But Jacob said, "No, I pray you; if you would do me this favor, accept from me these gifts; for to see your face is like seeing the face of God, and you have received me favorably. Please accept my present which has been brought to you, for God has favored me and I have plenty." (Genesis 33:10-11)

Esau does in fact accept this peace offering. This agreement is a unilateral agreement--only one party receives a tangible benefit, while the other receives an immaterial one. However, without a tremendous amount of bargaining or other bartering, Esau accepts the offering and an unspoken peace evolves.

ויאמר נסעה ונלכה ואלכה לנגדך:

"And Esau said, 'Let us start on our journey, and I will proceed at your pace'" (Genesis 33:12). But Jacob does not agree. He manufactures excuses as to why he wishes to continue alone on the journey home:

ויאמר אליו אדני ידע כי-הילדים רכים והצאן והבקר עלות עלי
ודפוקם יום אחד ומתו כל-הצאן: יעבר-נא אדני לפני עבדו ואני
אתנהלה לאטי לרגל המלאכה אשר-לפני ולרגל הילדים עד
אשר-אבא אל-אדני שעירה:

But he said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me, if they are driven hard a single day, all the flocks will die. Let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I travel slowly, at the pace of the cattle before me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir." (Genesis 33:13-14)

Esau attempts to offer some sort of assistance along the way, but once again, Jacob refuses:

ויאמר עשו אציגה-נא עמך מן-העם אשר אתי ויאמר למה
זה אמצא-חן בעיני אדני:

"Then Esau said, 'Let me assign to you some of the men who are with me,' but he said, 'Oh no, my lord is too kind to me!'" (Genesis 33:15). The confrontation has ended, and Jacob may live in peace with his family and his possessions.

♦ THE RAPE OF DINAH

After violating Dina (and subsequently falling in love with her) Hamor approaches his father as part of a quasi-business transaction--to procure Dina as his wife. Hamor appoints his father as the agent who will speak on his behalf:

ויאמר שכם אל-חמור אביו לאמר קח-לי את-הילדה הזאת לאשה:

"So Shechem said to his father Hamor, 'Get me this girl as a wife'" (Genesis 34:4). Hamor is not asking Shechem to literally "get" Dina, for she is already in his house. Rather, he is attempting to establish a kind of treaty. He intends to use his relationship with Dina to merge

the two peoples as one. The fact that he does not return Dina to her father's house indicates that he is using Dina as a bargaining chip.

וידבר חמור אתם לאמר שכב בני חשקה נפשו בבתכם תנו נא אתה
לו לאשה: והתחתנו אתנו בנתיכם תתנו לנו ואת-בנותינו תקחו לכם:
ואתנו תשבו והארץ תהיה לפניכם שבו וסחרוה והאחזו בה:

And Hamor spoke to them, saying, "My son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him in marriage. Intermarry with us; give your daughters to us; and take our daughters for yourselves. You will dwell among us, and the land will be open before you; settle, move about, and acquire holdings in it." (Genesis 34:8-10)

Shechem does not admit wrongdoing on the part of his son, but he does acknowledge that this transaction, should it transpire, would be considered a personal favor to him. In return, he offers an above-market price for the girl:

ויאמר שכב אל-אביה ואל-אחיה אמצא-חן בעיניכם ואשר תאמרו
אלי אתן: הרבו עלי מאד מחר ומתן ואתנה כאשר תאמרו אלי
ותנו-לי את-הנער לאשה:

Then Shechem said to her father and brothers, "Do me this favor, and I will pay whatever you tell me. Ask of me a bride-price ever so high, as well as gifts, and I will pay what you tell me; only give me the maiden for a wife."
(Genesis 34:11-12)

Ramban emphasizes that the words **מחר ומתן** (bride price and gifts), and comments that these words are customarily used in the purchase of a virgin bride. Dina is not a virgin, but Hamor is willing to do this "favor" for Jacob, paying as if she was indeed still a virgin. He most likely realized that he would be the *only* man willing to pay such a high price for damaged goods. Dina's brothers respond to his offer--note that although Hamor initially

addressed the father and the brothers, only the brothers respond.⁴⁰

ויענו בני-יעקב את-שכם ואת-חמור אביו במרמה וידברו אשר
טמא את דינה אחתם: ויאמרו אליהם לא נוכל לעשות הדבר הזה
לתת את-אחתנו לאיש אשר-לו ערלה כי-חרפה הוא לנו: אך-בזאת
נאות לכם אם תהיו כמנו להמל לכם כל-זכר: ונתנו את-בנותינו לכם
ואת-בנותיכם נקח-לנו וישבנו אתכם והיינו לכם אחד

Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor--speaking with guile because he had defiled their sister Dinah--and said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to a man who is uncircumcised, for that is a disgrace among us. Only on this condition will we agree with you that you will become like us in that every male among you is circumcised. Then we will give our daughters to you and take your daughters to ourselves; and we will dwell among you and become as one kindred. But if you will not listen to us and become circumcised, we will take our daughters and go." (Genesis 34: 13-17)

This is not a normal contract negotiation, because Hamor is not making a genuine offer. His offer is tainted by the fact that he has already performed the act for which he offers to pay. Radak states that the fact that the offer was not a offer in good-faith, allowed Jacob's sons to make an acceptance that was not in good-faith. In other words, they were "allowed" to cheat, according to this commentator.⁴¹ S'forno perceives the situation differently. He says that the brothers never expected Hamor to accept these unreasonable terms.⁴² Nevertheless, Hamor and Shechem take this offer seriously, and go back to their own townspeople to convince them to accept these terms:

⁴⁰ Rebekah's brother Laban was in charge of her marriage negotiations as we have already observed.

⁴¹ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II*, קיד.

⁴² *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II*, קיד.

ויבא חמור ושכם בנו אל-שער עירם וידברו אל-אנשי עירם לאמר:
האנשים האלה שלמים הם אתנו וישבו בארץ ויכחדו אתה והארץ
הנה רחבת-ידיים לפניכם את-בנתם נקח-לנו לנשים ואת-בנותינו נתן
להם: אך-בזאת יאתו לנו האנשים לשבת אתנו להיות לעם אחד
בהמול לנו כל-זכר כאשר הם נמלים: מקנהם וקנינם וכל-בהמתם
הלוא לנו הם אך נאותה להם וישבו אתנו:

So Hamor and Shechem went to the public place of their town and spoke to their fellow townsmen, saying, "**These people are our friends**, let them settle in the land and move about in it, for the land is large enough for them; we will take their daughters to ourselves as wives and give our daughters to them. But only on this condition will the men agree with us to dwell among us and be as one kindred: that all our males become circumcised as they are circumcised. **Their cattle and substance and all their beasts will be ours**, if we only agree to their terms, so that they will settle among us." (Genesis 34:20-23)

Hamor and Shechem address the whole town from the "public place" perhaps trying to draw the biggest audience possible. They proclaim that Jacob's family are their "friends" and that when the two peoples merge, not only will their children be allowed to marry one another, but that their material possessions will become collective, communal possessions. This was not stated in the original negotiations between Jacob's sons and Hamor--Hamor must convince his people that this is advantageous and will positively benefit the whole community (and not just his son's lustful desires). They succeed to convince the people that this merger would serve the interests of the entire community, and they fulfill their part of the contract, expecting that Jacob's family would do the same. However, this was not to be the case. Jacob's sons killed every male member of the community as they recovered from their surgeries, plundered the town, and captured the wives and the children. Jacob is terribly unhappy that his sons breached the contract that they had negotiated. He says that they have tarnished his name as an honest dealer, and the consequences of their actions

might result in his ultimate destruction

ויאמר יעקב אל-שמעון ואל-לוי עכרתם אתי להבאישני בישב
הארץ בכנעני ובפרזי ואני מתי מספר ונאספו עלי והכוני
ונשמדתי אני וביתי:

Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my men are few in number, so that if they unite against me and attack me; I and my house will be destroyed." (Genesis 34:30)

Jacob's reprimanding of his sons is so weak that it is problematic. He seems worried only that his own name will suffer. He will speak more powerfully on his when he "blesses" his children at the end of the book of Genesis (Genesis 49:5-7), but how is it feasible that he would view the unwarranted massacre of so many people merely as having brought a problem for himself? Jacob is portrayed as a man who makes no moral judgement on his sons. One scholar suggest that Jacob is silent because he has nothing to say. "He has already become the object of events and has entered the twilight of his life."⁴³

ויאמרו הכזונה יעשה את-אחותנו:

"But they answered, 'Should our sister be treated like a whore?'" (Genesis 34:31). They respond that there are some things that are simply not negotiable. Furthermore, to reiterate what Radak stated earlier, the contract was never a binding contract because it was based on false premises.

⁴³ Plaut 229.

♦ JOSEPH

The rest of the book of Genesis is devoted to the story of Joseph and his brothers. Sibling rivalry and power struggles feature prominently in the early stages of this story. The biblical authors create a situation in which Joseph has to be lowered (literally) to the bottom of the corporate totem pole before he can take his rightful place as an executive vice president in the Egyptian corporate structure. In his initial interactions with his brothers, he has little political savvy:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שְׁמַעוּ-נָא הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חָלַמְתִּי וְהִנֵּה אֲנִי
מֵאֱלֹמִים אֱלֹמִים בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה קִמָּה אֱלֹמִתִּי וְגַם-נִצְבָּה
וְהִנֵּה תִסְבִּינָה אֱלֹמֹתֵיכֶם וְתִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְאֱלֹמֹתִי:

He said to them, "Hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were binding sheaves in the field, when suddenly my sheaf stood up and remained upright; then your sheaves gathered around and bowed low to my sheaf."
(Genesis 37:6-7)

In the biblical world, dreams were acknowledged as vehicles of divine disclosure. Does Joseph realize the severity of his words? He does not speak harshly--in fact he asks his brothers to שְׁמַעוּ-נָא (please listen) to his dream. Yet his brothers answer him with abrupt words:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אָחִיו הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם-מִשׁוֹל תִּמְשַׁל בָּנוּ וַיּוֹסֶפֶר
עוֹד שְׁנָא אֹתוֹ עַל-חֲלֹמְתּוֹ וְעַל-דְּבָרָיו:

"His brothers answered, 'Do you mean to reign over us? Do you mean to rule over us?' And they hated him even more for his talk about his dreams" (Genesis 37:8). Perhaps Joseph did not comprehend their anger toward him, for he continues to relay his second dream to them.

וַיַּחֲלֹם עוֹד חֲלוֹם אַחֵר וַיּוֹסֶפֶר אֹתוֹ לְאָחָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה חֲלֹמְתִי חֲלוֹם

עוד והנה השמש והירח ואחד עשר כוכבים משתחוים לי: ויספר
אל-אביו ואל-אחיו ויגער-בו אביו ויאמר לו מה החלום הזה אשר
חלמת הבוא נבוא אני ואמך ואחייך להשתחות לך ארצה:

He dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers, saying, "Look, I have had another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were all bowing down to me." And when he told it to his father and brothers, his father berated him. "What," he said to him, "is this dream you have dreamed? Are we to come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow low, to you to the ground?" (Genesis 37:9-10)

Jacob still does not understand the growing resentment directed toward him. Ramban emphasizes that his father chastises him to reduce his brother's anger toward him. Jacob presumes that if they think that he is angry with him, the brothers' anger will dissipate.⁴⁴ However, this is not to be the case. In the next scene, Jacob sends his favored son to his brothers who are pasturing away from the house:

ויאמר ישראל אל-יוסף הלא אחייך רעים בשכם לכה ואשלחך
אליהם ויאמר לו הנני:

Israel said to Joseph, "Your brothers are pasturing at Shechem. Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "I am ready." (Genesis 37:13)

Joseph does not interpret the situation adequately, for he shows no fear whatsoever of remaining alone with his brothers away from his father's protection. After taunting them with his superiority, and telling them about his master plan that he will eventually rule over them, Joseph should have felt trepidation about this impending meeting. Yet he simply maintains that he is prepared to go to them. His father instructs him:

⁴⁴ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II*, קכז.

ויאמר לו לך-נא ראה את-שלום אחיך ואת-שלום הצאן והשבני
דבר וישלחנו מעמק חברון ויבא שכמה:

"And he said to him, 'Go and see how your brothers are and how the flocks are faring, and bring me back word'" (Genesis 37:14). Joseph goes on his way to watch over his brother's endeavors. On the way he encounters an unnamed man, who directs him on the correct path.

וימצאנו איש והנה הועה בשדה וישאלהו האיש לאמר מה-תבקש:
ויאמר את-אחי אנכי מבקש הגידה-נא לי איפה הם רעים:

The man asked him, "What are you looking for?" He answered, "I am looking for my brothers. Could you tell me where they are pasturing?" (Genesis 37:15-16)

ויאמר האיש נסעו מזה כי שמעתי אמרים נלכה דתינה וילך יוסף
אחר אחיו וימצאם בדין:

"The man said, 'They have gone from here, for I heard them say, "Let us go to Dothan"' (Genesis 37:17). The man directs Joseph on the correct path, and he finally encounters his brothers. As he approached them, his brothers noticed their younger brother on his way toward them:

ויאמרו איש אל-אחיו זונה בעל החלמות הלזה בא: ועתה לכו
ונחרגנו ונשלכו באחד הברות ואמרנו חיה רעה אכלתהו
ונראה מה-יהיו חלמתיו:

They said to each other, "Here comes that dreamer! Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we can say, 'A savage beast devoured him.' We shall see what comes of his dreams!" (Genesis 37:20)

When they see Joseph approaching, his brothers hold an impromptu meeting in which to decide Joseph's future. S'forno emphasizes that when the brothers say ועתה לכו (come now) to each other, it means that they need unanimous consent in order

for this deception to take place. However Reuben strongly opposes the idea of murdering Joseph. He is the only brother who can think of the long-term consequences of such an act

וישמע ראובן ויצלחו מידם ויאמר לא נכנו נפש ויאמר אלהם
ראובן אל-תשפכו דם השליכו אתו אל-חבור הזה אשר במדבר
ויד אל-תשלחו-בו למען הציל אתו מידם להשיבו אל-אביו:

But when Reuben heard it, he tried to save him from them. He said, "Let us not take his life." And Reuben went on, "Shed no blood! Cast him into that pit outside of the wilderness, but do not touch him yourselves"--intending to save him from them and restore him to his father. (Genesis 37:21-22)

Reuben attempts to mediate on behalf of the unknowing lad, but the brothers are adamant that Joseph should perish. Joseph continues to approach his brothers in the field. Judah makes another proposal, and suggests that there is an more advantageous plan of action:

ויאמר יהודה אל-אחיו מה-בצע כי נהרג את-אחינו וכסינו את-דמו:
לכו ונמכרנו לישמעאלים וידנו אל-תחי-בו כי-אחינו בשרנו
הוא וישמעו אחיו:

Then Judah said to his brothers, "What do we gain by killing our brother and covering up his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishamelites, but let us not do away with him ourselves. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh." His brothers agreed. (Genesis 37:26-27)

Judah decides--and convinces his brothers--not only that there is no gain in killing Joseph, but that they could make a profit on him as well. They make a almost unanimous decision to sell him to the Midianites and lie to their father upon their return. But one brother--Reuben-- was absent from the discussion. He had already expressed his objection to killing Joseph. Reuben's intention--according to the narrator, for his brothers would have boycotted his desires--was to return the boy unharmed to his father. Now, this would prove to be impossible:

וישב אל-אחיו ויאמר הילד איננו ואני אנה-אני-בא:

"Returning to the brothers, he said, 'The boy is gone! Now, what am I supposed to do?'" (Genesis 37:30). His plans were spoiled, and there was no way of undoing what the brothers had done. The brothers take Joseph's tunic back to their father:

וישלחו את-כתנת הפסים ויביאו אל-אביהם ויאמרו זאת מצאנו
הכר-נא הכתנת בנך הוא-אם-לא:

"They had the ornamented tunic taken to their father, and they said, 'We found this. Please examine it; is it your son's tunic or not?'" (Genesis 37:32). The brothers address their father in the polite form as Joseph addressed them in the fields. His response is surprising, for as we noted above, these words were the ones that the brothers presupposed that they would use to explain the disappearance of Joseph to their father.

ויכירה ויאמר כתנת בני חיה רעה אכלתהו טרף טרף יוסף:

He recognized it, and said, "My son's tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Joseph was torn by a beast!" (Genesis 37:33)

Jacob refused to be comforted by his children as he mourned the assumed death of his son:

ויקמו כל-בניו וכל-בנותיו לנחמו וימאן להתנחם ויאמר כי-אֵרֶד
אל-בני אבל שאלה ויבך אתו אביו:

All his sons and daughters sought to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted, saying "No, I will go down mourning to my son in Sheol." Thus his father bewailed him. (Genesis 37:35)

The brothers make a transaction which results in the marketing and merchandising of Joseph--even though we might think of him as "stolen goods," making the transaction illegal. Nevertheless, they succeed in completing the agreement and Joseph leaves with his new owners.

♦ JOSEPH: THE DREAM INTERPRETER

This portion of the Joseph story utilizes direct discourse primarily for two reasons: to expound and interpret the dreams of the butler, the baker, and Pharaoh, and to move Joseph up the corporate ladder. We shall see that Joseph's political savvy has improved tremendously over the course of his years in servitude and captivity.

וישאל את-סריסי פרעה אשר אתו במשמר בית אדניו לאמר
מדוע פניכם רעים היום:

"He asked Pharaoh's courtiers, who were with him in custody in the master's house, saying, 'Why do you appear so downcast today?'" (Genesis 40:7). Joseph demonstrates an ability to perceive the emotional state of those who surround him--unlike the episode when he relayed those initial dreams to his brothers. Additionally, his listening abilities improve as he matures. These two invaluable skills aid Joseph as he climbs the ladder of success to become second-in-command of Egypt. The prisoners respond to Joseph's inquiry:

ויאמרו אליו חלום חלמנו ופטר אין אתו ויאמר אלהם יוסף הלא
לאֱלֹהִים פִּתְרָנִים סִפְרוּ-נָא לִי:

And they said to him, "We had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them." So Joseph said to them, "Surely God can interpret! Tell me [your dreams]." (Genesis 40:8)

Joseph takes a calculated gamble--what can he lose? He can only stand to profit from a correct interpretation. Joseph seizes the opportunity, although he does not know if this gratis dream interpretation clinic will expand his business. Joseph emphasizes that he is blessed by God, and that though God he will be able to interpret the dreams correctly. These are not his own interpretations, yet without him God will not have a vehicle to deliver these interpretations. Therefore, he makes himself a valuable commodity. The two men relay their

dreams to Joseph, hoping for favorable interpretations

ויספר שר-המשקים את-חלמו ליוסף ויאמר לו בחלומי והנה-גפן
לפני ובגפן שלשה שריגם והיא כפרחת עלתה נצה הבשילו
אשכלתיה ענבים: וכוס פרעה בירי ואקח את-הענבים ואשחט
אתם אל-כוס פרעה ואתן את-הכוס על-כף פרעה.

Then the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph. He said to him, "In my dream, there was a vine in front of me. One the vine were three branches. It had barely budded, when out came its blossoms and its clusters ripened into grapes. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." (Genesis 40: 9-11)

Joseph interprets this dream beneficially for the cupbearer. Radak believes that there is no divine intervention here at all--rather, Joseph uses his own perception to interpret the dreams. He takes a calculated risk in interpreting.⁴⁵ Joseph realizes that this man will be in a free man in a few days, and therefore plants an idea into his head, hoping that he might be able to assist Joseph in the future. Notice that half of the following quote is the interpretation, the other half is a plea for assistance.

ויאמר לו יוסף זה פתרנו שלשת השרגים שלשת ימים הם: בעוד
שלשת ימים ישא פרעה את-ראשך והשיבך על-כנך ונתת כוס-פרעה
בירי כמשפט הראשון אשר היית משקהו: כי אם-זכרתני אתך כאשר
ייטב לך ועשית-נא עמדי חסד והזכרתני אל-פרעה והוצאתני
מן-הבית הזה:

Joseph said to him, "This is the interpretation: The three branches are three days. In three days Pharaoh will pardon you and restore you to your post; you will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand, as was your custom formerly where you were his cupbearer. But think of me when all is well with you again, and do me the kindness of mentioning me to Pharaoh so as to set me free from this place. For in truth, I was kidnaped from the land of the Hebrews' nor have I done anything here that they should have put me in the dungeons. (Genesis 40:12-15)

⁴⁵ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II, קעה.*

However, in the second interpretation the end result is not as favorable for the respective dreamer:

וירא שר-האפים כי טוב פתר ויאמר אל-יוסף אף-אני בחלומי והנה
שלשה סלי חרי על-ראשי: ובסל העליון מכל מאכל פרעה מעשה
אפה והעוף אכל אתם מן-הסל מעל ראשי

When the chief baker saw how favorably he had interpreted, he said to Joseph, "In my dream, similarly, there were three openwork baskets on my head. In the uppermost basket there were all kinds of for Pharaoh that a baker prepares; and the birds were eating it out of the basket above my head" (Genesis 40:16-17)

בעוד שלשת ימים ישא פרעה את-ראשך מעליך ותלה אותך על-עץ
ואכל העוף את-בשרך מעלי:

Joseph answered, "This is the interpretation: The three baskets are three days. In three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and impale you upon a pole; and the birds will pick off your flesh." (Genesis 40:19)

Notice the difference in this interpretation. Since Joseph believes that this man will die shortly, there is no reason to make the impassioned plea that he made to the first. Due to the lack of divine intervention in this case we may assume that Joseph actually chose between the two prisoners the one who is more likely to be freed and restored to his former position. That is to say: Joseph knew how to identify the better contact, and cultivated a positive relationship with this man. He correctly ascertained who was to live and who was to die. Eventually, this episode proved to be quite fruitful for Joseph. The survivor--the pharaoh's cup bearer--remembered Joseph at a critical moment in conversation with Pharaoh, which led to Joseph's release from captivity:

וידבר שר המשקים את-פרעה לאמר את-חטאי אני מזכיר היום
פרעה קצף על-עבדיו ויתן אותי במשמר בית שר הטבחים אתי ואת

שר האפים ונחלמה חלום בלילה אחד אני והוא איש כפתרון חלמו
 חלמנו ושם אתנו נער עברי עבד לשר הטבחים ונספר-לו ויפתר-
 לנו את-חלמתינו איש כחלמו פתר ושם אתנו נער עברי עבד
 לשר הטבחים ונספר-לו ויפתר-לנו את-חלמתינו איש כחלמו
 פתר ויהי כאשר פתר-לנו כן היה אתי השיב על-כני ואתו תלה

The chief cupbearer then spoke up and said to Pharaoh, "I must make mention today of my offenses. Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and placed me in custody in the house of the chief steward, together with the chief baker. We had dreams the same night, he and I, each of us a dream with a meaning of its own. A Hebrew youth was there with us, a servant of the chief steward; and when we told him our dreams. He interpreted them for us, telling each of the meaning of his dream. And as he interpreted for us, so it came to pass: I was restored to my post and the other was impaled. (Genesis 41:9-13)

Therefore, Joseph's contact did in fact repay the debt that he acquired while in prison. The pharaoh called for Joseph to interpret his troubling dreams.

ויאמר פרעה אל-יוסף חלום חלמתי ופתר אין אתו ואני שמעתי
 עליך לאמרתשמע חלום לפתר אתו:

And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it. Now I have heard it said of you that for you to hear a dream is to tell its meaning." (Genesis 41:15)

Once again, Joseph chooses to attribute his power of interpretation to God, to authenticate his explanations. Rashi says "it is not my wisdom, it is God who will put the answer in my mouth for the welfare of the king."⁴⁶ On a different matter, Joseph always addresses the pharaoh in the third person, a technique which is rarely found in the Pentateuch and therefore should be emphasized. This pattern of addressing another party is not found *anywhere* else in the Pentateuch. Therefore, it is quite difficult to ascertain the reason for its prominence

⁴⁶ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II*, קפה.

here in this passage. Perhaps it is a sign of respect--or of disdain

ויען יוסף את-פרעה לאמר בלעדי אלהים יענה את-שלום פרעה:

"Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, 'Not I! God will see to Pharaoh's welfare'" (Genesis

41:16). Pharaoh relays his dreams to his new interpreter:

וידבר פרעה אל-יוסף בחלמי הנני עמד על-שפת היאר והנה
מן-היאר עלת שבע פרות בריאות בשר ויפת תאר ותרעינה באחו
והנה שבע-פרות אחרות עלות אחריהן דלות ורעות תאר מאד
ורקות בשר לא-ראיתי כהנה בכל-ארץ מצרים לרע ותאכלנה
הפרות הרקות והרעות את שבע הפרות הראשנות הבריאות
ותבאנה אל-קרבנה ולא נודע כי-באו אל-קרבנה ומראיהן
רע כאשר בתחלה ואיקץ וארא בחלמי והנה שבע שבילים עלת
בקנה אחד מלאות וטבות והנה שבע שבילים צנמות דקות שרפות
קדים צמחות אחריהם ותבלען השבילים הדקת את שבע השבילים
הטבות ואמר אל-החרטמים ואין מגיד לי

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream, I was standing on the bank of the Nile came up seven sturdy cows and grazed in the reed grass. Presently there followed them seven other cows, scrawny, ill-formed, and emaciated--never had I seen their likes for ugliness in all the land of Egypt! And the seven lean and ugly cows ate up the first seven cows, the sturdy ones, but when they had consumed them, one could not tell that they had consumer them, for they looked just as bad as before. And I awoke. In my other dream, I saw seven ears of grain, full and healthy, growing on a single stalk; but right behind them sprouted seven ears, shriveled, thin, and scorched by the east wind. And the thin ears swallowed the seven healthy ears. I have told my magicians but none has an explanation for me. (Genesis 41:17-24)

Joseph responds:

ויאמר יוסף אל-פרעה חלום פרעה אחד הוא את אשר האלהים
עשה הגיד לפרעה שבע פרת הטבת שבע שנים הנה ושבע השבילים
הטבת שבע שנים הנה חלום אחד הוא ושבע הפרות הרקות והרעות
העלת אחריהן שבע שנים הנה ושבע השבילים הרקות שרפות

הקדים יהיו שבע שני רעב הוא הדבר אשר דברתי אל-פרעה אשר האלהים עשה הראה את-פרעה הנה שבע שנים באות שבע גדול בכל-ארץ מצרים וקמו שבע שני רעב אחריהן ונשכח כל-השבע בארץ מצרים וכלה הרעב את-הארץ ולא-יודע השבע בארץ מפני הרעב ההוא אחרי-כן כי-כבד הוא מאד ועל השנות החלום אל-פרעה פעמים כי-נכון הדבר מעם האלהים וממהר האלהים לעשותו ועתה ירא פרעה איש נבון וחכם וישיתחו על-ארץ מצרים יעשה פרעה ויפקד פקדים על-הארץ וחמש את-ארץ מצרים בשבע שני השבע ויקבצו את-כל-אכל השנים הטבת הבאת האלה ויצברו-בר תחת יד-פרעה אכל בערים ושמרו והיה האכל לפקדון לארץ לשבע שני הרעב אשר תחיו בארץ מצרים ולא-תכרת הארץ ברעב

And Joseph told Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are only one and the same. God has told Pharaoh what He is about to do. The seven healthy cows are seven years, and the seven healthy ears are seven years; it is the same dream. The seven lean and ugly cows that followed are seven years, as are also the seven empty ears scorched by the east wind; they are seven years of famine. It is just as I have told Pharaoh." God as revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. Immediately ahead are seven years of great abundance in all the land of Egypt. After them will come seven years of famine, and all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. As the land is ravaged by famine, no trace of the abundance will be left in the land because of the famine thereafter, for it will be very severe. As for Pharaoh having had the same dream twice, it means that the matter has been determined by God, and that God will soon carry it out. Accordingly, **let Pharaoh find a man of discernment and wisdom**, and set him over the land of Egypt. And let Pharaoh take steps to appoint overseers over the land, and organize the land of Egypt in the seven years of plenty. Let all the good of these good years that are coming be gathered, and let the grain be collected under Pharaoh's authority as food to be stored in these cities. Let that food be a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will come upon the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish in the famine. (Genesis 41:25-36)

The second part of this interpretation is more than an interpretation--Joseph creates a solution to the challenges that lie ahead, and plants an idea in Pharaoh's mind that he needs assistance from a man with discrimination and insight and would be willing to share his power, allowing him to rule over the land. Who else could Joseph refer to but himself?

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל-יוֹסֵף אַחֲרֵי הוֹדִיעַ אֱלֹהִים אוֹתָךְ אֶת-כָּל-זֹאת
 אֵין-נִבּוֹן וְחָכָם כַּמוֹךָ: אֵתָּה תִּהְיֶה עַל-בֵּיתִי וְעַל-פִּיךָ יִשָּׁק כָּל-עַמִּי
 רַק הֲכֵסָא אֲגִדֵּל מִמֶּךָ. וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל-יוֹסֵף רְאֵה נָתַתִּי אֹתָךְ עַל
 כָּל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is none so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my court, and by your command shall all my people be directed; only with respect to the throne shall I be superior to you." Pharaoh further instructs Joseph, "See, I put you in charge of all the land of Egypt." (Genesis 41:39-41)

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל-יוֹסֵף אֲנִי פַרְעֹה וּבְלִעְדִּיךָ לֹא-יָרִים אִישׁ
 אֶת-יָדוֹ וְאֶת-רַגְלוֹ בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, yet without you, no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." (Genesis 41:44)

Pharaoh immediately appoints Joseph to this position, the second in command of Egypt. Only Pharaoh stands above him--and he relinquishes most of his responsibility to his newest employee. In a matter of a few paragraphs of biblical text, Joseph moves up the corporate ladder from the lowest place in his life to the very highest. Joseph speculates that if he plants this idea in Pharaoh's mind, the prospects would be quite good that he would be appointed to this position. He was correct in his assumption.

♦ JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS: REVISITED

Meanwhile, Jacob and his remaining sons are in a difficult position. They know that rations are scarce in their community, while in Egypt there was more than enough to be found. Therefore, Jacob instructs his sons to journey down to Egypt and purchase food for the family:

וירא יעקב כי יש-שבר במצרים ויאמר יעקב לבניו למה תתראו
ויאמר הנה שמעתי כי יש-שבר במצרים רדו-שמה ושברו-לנו משם
ונחיה ולא נמות:

When Jacob saw that there were food rations to be had in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you keep looking at one another? Now I hear," he went on, "that there are rations to be had in Egypt. Go down and procure rations for us there, that we may live and not die" (Genesis 42:1-2)

The brothers agree to do so, and they leave for Egypt ready to complete their mission and return home. They take no initiative in the matter--they are not motivated--while Jacob still controls the family and makes the executive decisions. The brothers make no verbal response--they are in silent acquiescence with their father. They arrive in Egypt, prepared to purchase their rations and return to their families. However, Joseph had other ideas:

וירא יוסף את-אחיו ויכרם ויתנכר אליהם וידבר אתם קשות
ויאמר אלהם מאין באתם ויאמרו מארץ כנען לשבר-אכל:

When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them; he acted like a stranger toward them and spoke harshly to them. He asked them, "Where do you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan to procure food." (Genesis 42:7)

The intention of this conversation--from the brothers' perspective--is directly related to making an acquisition. The brothers answer Joseph--not just with the information that he required, but with the purpose of their mission. They only had business on their minds, and we not interested in idle chatting before such a deal might be realized. Yet Joseph prevented them from making the deal so quickly:

ויזכר יוסף את החלמות אשר חלם להם ויאמר אלהם מרגלים
אתם לראות את-ערוות הארץ באתם:

Recalling the dreams that he had dreamed about them, Joseph said to them,

"You are spies, you have come to see the land in its nakedness" (Genesis 42:9)

Perhaps this is an attempt to stall the brothers, since Joseph intends to procure information and he has not yet had the time to do so, without revealing his true identity. He certainly does not want this transaction to occur without engaging them in some form of haggling and bartering.

כלנו בני איש אחד נחנו כנים אנחנו לא-היו עבדיך מרגלים:

But they said to him, "No, my lord! Truly, your servants have come to procure food. We are all of us sons of the same man, we are honest men, your servants have never been spies!" (Genesis 42:11)

The brothers deny this accusation, and this detour in the conversation redirects their attention from purchasing food to defending their position in Egypt. S'forno says that they emphasize

כלנו בני איש אחד (we are all sons of the same man) in their speech, they mean to say

"Had we been spies for a king, do you think a king would have sent twelve brothers to spy?"⁴⁷ Within a matter of moments, they find themselves in a very dangerous situation.

Joseph reiterates his accusation. The quotations in 43:3, 5 and 7 highlight by sheer weight of repetition that Joseph's demand to see Benjamin is the single factor that controls the fate of his family:

ויאמר אלהם לא כי-ערות הארץ באתם לראות:

"And he said to them, 'No, you have come to see the land in its nakedness!'" (Genesis 42:12).

Seemingly, there is no reason that Joseph must repeat his accusation so many times. However,

⁴⁷ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II*, קצט.

this time he receives a response from them--more information about his father and his brother.

ויאמרו שנים עשר עבדיך אחים אנחנו בני איש-אחד בארץ
כנען והנה הקטן את-אבינו היום והאחר איננו:

And they replied, "We your servants were twelve brothers, sons of a certain man in the land of Canaan, the youngest, however, is with our father, and one is no more." (Genesis 42:13)

Not only are they brothers, but they furnish Joseph with the family tree. They continue to attempt to establish their legitimacy, so that they may return to their original intent--to procure food for themselves and for their families. However, Joseph is unwilling to allow them to make this transition. He continues to accuse them in this matter:

ויאמר אלהם יוסף הוא אשר דברתי אלכם לאמר מרגלים אתם:
בזאת תבחנו חי פרעה אם-תצאו מזה כי אם-בכוא אחיכם הקטן
הנה: שלחו מכם אחד ויקח את- אחיכם ואתם האסרו ויבחנו
דבריהם האמת אתכם ואם- לא חי פרעה כי מרגלים אתם:

But Joseph said to them "It is just as I have told you: You are spies! By this you shall be put to the test: unless your youngest brother comes here, by Pharaoh, you shall not depart from this place! Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain confined, that your words may be put to the test whether there is truth in you. Else, by Pharaoh, you are nothing but spies!" (Genesis 42:14-16)

Joseph uses his own words as "proof" of his accusation of spying, even though the brothers' account of their situation has given him little evidence for such a charge. Normally we consider the story from Joseph's perspective: Joseph's intent is strictly personal at this point. He wishes to reunite with his youngest brother who is not present with the rest of the brothers, and his plan reflects this intention. However, the brothers are still in the

market to buy rations from Egypt. From their perspective, bringing their brother back to Egypt is a condition which they must fulfill in order to make their purchase. Joseph's original plan calls for one brother to return while the rest remain, but for an undisclosed reason, he changes his mind, and sends *all* of the brothers back with the exception of one:

ויאמר אלהם יוסף ביום השלישי זאת עשו וחיו את-האלהים אני
ירא-אם-כנים אתם אחיכם אחד ואסר בבית משמרכם ואתם לכו
הביאו שבר רעבון בתיכם ואת-אחיכם הקטן תביאו אלי ויאמנו
דברכם ולא תמותו ויעשו-כן

On the third day Joseph said to them, "Do this and you shall live, for I am a God-fearing man. If you are honest men, let one of you brothers be held in your place of detention, while the rest of you go and take home rations for your starving households, but you must bring me your youngest brother, that your words may be verified and that you may not die." (Genesis 42:18-20)

He makes a concession, to send most of the brothers back. S'forno explains that Joseph says that they should complete their task so *ולא תמותו* (you may not die) means that he wished for them to know that his power also reaches into Canaan. If they chose not to return, he would not only kill the brother still kept in captivity, but send men after them to take their lives as well.⁴⁸ Joseph meant business.

ויאמרו איש אל-אחיו אבל אשמים אנחנו על-אחינו אשר ראינו
צרת נפשו בהתחננו אלינו ולא שמענו על-כן באה אלינו הצרה
הזאת:

They said to one another, "Alas, we are being punished on account of our brother, because we looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us. That is why this distress has come upon us." (Genesis 42:21)

Initially, this matter should have been quite a simple one. Jacob sends his sons to buy rations,

⁴⁸ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II*, ר"א.

and they find themselves in a predicament from which they will not easily emerge. They do not place the blame on Joseph, but on themselves, as they deduce that this episode is a result of their shady business transaction long ago in the fields when they sold their brother into slavery. Reuben admonishes his brothers.

ויען ראובן אתם לאמר הלא אמרתי אליכם לאמר אל-תחטאו
בילד ולא שמעתם וגם-דמו הנה נדרש.

Then Reuben spoke up and said to them, "Did I not tell you, 'Do no wrong to the boy'? But you paid no heed. Now comes the reckoning for his blood."
(Genesis 42:22)

The brothers begin their journey back to Canaan. However, on the route home, one of the brothers finds that his money is in his bag, as Joseph has schemed.

ויאמר אל- אחיו הושב כספי וגם הנה באמתחתי ויצא לבם ויחרדו
איש אל-אחיו לאמר מה-זאת עשה אלהים לנו.

And he said to his brothers, "My money has been returned! It is here in my bag! Their hearts sank, and, trembling, they turned to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?" (Genesis 42:28)

The brothers, having little choice in the matter, arrive home and carefully reconstruct the events that take place. The brothers are totally thrown off of their mission by this man who is in control of their fates and their brother's fate:

דבר האיש אדני הארץ אתנו קשות ויתן אתנו כמרגלים את-הארץ;
ונאמר אליו כנים אנחנו לא היינו מרגלים: שנים-עשר אנחנו אחים
בני אבינו האחד איננו והקטן היום את-אבינו בארץ כנען: ויאמר
אלינו האיש אדני הארץ בזאת אדע כי כנים אתם אחיכם האחד
הניחו אתי ואת-רעבון בתיכם קחו ולכו והביאו את-אחיכם הקטן
אלי: ואדעה כי לא מרגלים אתם כי כנים אתם את - אחיכם אתן
לכם ואת-הארץ תסחרו:

"The man who is lord of the land spoke harshly to us and accused us of spying on the land. We said to him, 'We are honest men, we have never been spies! There were twelve of us brothers, sons of the same father, but one is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in the land of Canaan.' But the man who is lord of the land said to us, 'By this I shall know you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, and take something for your starving households and be off.' And bring your youngest brother to me, that I may know that you are not spies but honest men. I will then restore your brother to you, and you shall be free to move about in the land." (Genesis 42:30-34)

Jacob's immediate reference to Joseph's absence and his use of the same word for Simeon's fate suggest a comparison with the report the brothers made to Jacob in Genesis 37:32. In that instance Jacob accepted their version of the events so completely that the narrator has Jacob spontaneously conclude that Joseph is ripped to pieces using the same words the brothers planned to use to explain Joseph's disappearance in 37:20 but never spoke aloud. In this instance, the discovery of the money causes Jacob to doubt the veracity of their present account and even to suspect foul play toward Simeon on their part. Jacob is obviously displeased with his sons and rebuke them. This reprimand they receive from their father functions as a long-awaited and much-deserved condemnation that they did not receive in response to the annihilation of the city of Shechem:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם אֲחֵי שְׂכֵלְתֶם יוֹסֵף אֵינְנוּ וְשִׁמְעוֹן
אֵינְנוּ וְאַתָּה בְּנִימֵן תִּקְחוּ עָלֵינוּ כְּלָנָה:

Their father Jacob said to them, "It is always me that you bereave: Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you would take away Benjamin. These things always happen to me!" (Genesis 42:36)

Jacob is incapable of considering the bigger picture--he is no longer objective. He does not see that unless he relents and allows his sons to return with Benjamin (the ultimately playing piece in this transaction--without him there will be no trade) he staunchly refuses and

jeopardizes the lives of all of his other sons, and his whole brood, for no food may be procured until they meet Joseph's demands. Reuben attempts to make a deal with his father, to provide him with collateral in case they do not return home safely with Benjamin and Simeon alive and well.

ויאמר ראובן אל-אביו לאמר את-שני בני תמית אם-לא אביאנו
אליך תנה אתו על-ידי ואני אשיבנו אליך.

Then Reuben said to his father, "You may kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my care, and I will return him to you."
(Genesis 42:37)

Jacob refuses to accept these terms. The collateral that Reuben offers is not as valuable as the life of the son borne from his beloved Rachel. Under no circumstances will Jacob allow Benjamin to leave with his brothers:

ויאמר לא-יורד בני עמכם כי-אחיו מת והוא לבדו נשאר וקראהו
אסון בדרך אשר תלכו-בה והורדתם את-שיבתי ביגון שאולח:

But he said, "My son must not go down with you, for his brother is dead and he alone is left. If he meets with disaster on the journey you are taking, you will send my white head down to Sheol in grief." (Genesis 42:38)

He asks his sons to go back to Egypt, without offering to send Benjamin with them:

ויחי כאשר כלו לאכל את-השבר אשר הביאו ממצרים ויאמר
אליהם אביהם שבו שברו-לנו מעט-אכל:

And when they had eaten up the rations which they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again and procure some food for us."
(Genesis 43:2)

Once again, Jacob acts irrationally. He refuses to admit that without allowing Benjamin to go down with his brother as a bargaining chip, they will never again procure rations from Egypt.

Without these rations, they would simply starve to death. Jacob could afford to be stubborn as long as the food brought from Egypt was enough to sustain them. However, once the rations diminished, Jacob must weigh his options and deal with the reality set before him

ויאמר אליו יהודה לאמר העד העד בנו האיש לאמר לא-תראו
פני בלתי אחיכם אתכם: אם-ישך משלח את-אחינו אתנו נרדה
ונשברה לך אכל: ואם-אינך משלח לא נרד כי-האיש אמר אלינו
לא-תראו פני בלתי אחיכם אתכם.

But Judah said to him, "The man warned us, 'Do not let me see your faces unless your brother is with you.' If you will let our brother go with us, we will go down and procure food for you' but if you will not let him go, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'Do not let me see your faces unless your brother is with you.'" (Genesis 43:3-5)

The first time that Jacob asked his sons to go down to Egypt, they did not make a verbal response. However, this time, Judah responds on behalf of the brothers. He stresses to his father the necessity of Benjamin's presence, and emphasizes that they will not succeed unless the boy comes with them. Jacob is still reluctant to confront the reality that his sons have no choice in this matter. Therefore, he makes futile and unnecessary accusations that are irrelevant to the main objective of procuring rations:

ויאמר ישראל למה הרעתם לי להגיד לאיש העוד לכם אח:

And Israel said, "Why did you serve me so ill as to tell the man that you had another brother?" (Genesis 43:6). They explain to their father that there was nothing that they could have done to prevent the matter--that they assumed that it was part of the negotiation, and without providing this information, they would have never been able to bring back the rations that they did manage to purchase:

ויאמרו שאול שאול-האיש לנו ולמולדתנו לאמר העוד אביכם

חי היש לכם אח ונגד-לו על-פי הדברים האלה הידוע נדע
כי יאמר הורידו את-אחיכם:

They replied, "But the man kept asking about us and our family, saying, 'Is your father still living? Have you another brother?' And we answered him accordingly. How were we to know that he would say, 'Bring your brother here?'" (Genesis 43:7)

Judah makes another attempt to convince his father to provide them with the crucial bargaining chip:

ויאמר יהודה אל-ישראל אביו שלחח הנער אתי ונקומה ונלכח
ונחיה ולא נמות גם-אנחנו גם-אתה גם-טפנו: אנכי אערבנו מיד
תבקשנו אם-לא הביאתיו אליך והצגתיו לפניך וחטאתי לך
כל-הימים כי לולא התמהמהנו כי-עתה שבנו זה פעמים:

Then Judah said to his father Israel, "send the boy in my care, and let us be on our way, that we may live and not die--you and we and our children. I myself will be surety for him: you may hold me responsible: if I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, I shall stand guilty before you forever. For we could have been there and back twice if we had not dawdled." (Genesis 43:8-10)

Two conditions have changed since Reuben made the initial offer. As previously stated, Reuben offered collateral that was not as valuable as the object in consideration. Perhaps Jacob considered Judah's honor inestimable and therefore more binding. A person's name and a person's honor were priceless commodities in the ancient Near East. However, another condition has changed as well: when Reuben offered his sons, the brothers had just returned from Egypt, and the rations sat in front of Jacob as he made his decision. Now the rations were depleted, and Jacob had little choice in the matter. Therefore, he accepts this proposal, and allows Benjamin to travel with his brothers.

ויאמר אלהם ישראל אביהם אם-כן אפוא זאת עשו קחו מזמרת

הארץ בכליכם והורידו לאיש מנחה מעט צרי ומעט דבש נכאת
ולט בטנים ושקדים: וכסף משנה קחו בידכם ואת-הכסף המושב
בפי אמתחתים תשיבו בידכם אולי משנה הוא ואת-אחיכם
קחו וקומו שובו אל-האיש: האיש ושלח לכם את-אחיכם אחד ואל
שדי יתן לכם רחמים לפני ואת-בנימין ואני כאשר שכלתי שכלתי:

Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, do this, take some of the choice products of the land in your baggage, and carry them down as a gift for the man--some balm and some honey, gum, laudanum, pistachio nuts, and almonds. And take with you double the money, carrying back with you the money that was replaced in the mouths of your bags, perhaps it was a mistake. Take your brother too; and go back at once to the man. And may El Shaddai dispose the man to mercy toward you, that he may release to you your other brother, as well as Benjamin. As for me, if I am to be bereaved, I shall be bereaved." (Genesis 43:11-14)

Jacob finally relents, and in the process recovers part of his business savvy. He gives his sons business advice regarding the manner in which they should flatter the king's assistant and how to avoid any possible accusation of theft by bringing more money than is necessary. The brothers journey down to Egypt, and go to Joseph to make the agreement, free their brother and buy more rations. Joseph notes their arrival and makes preparations for his brothers to eat with him.

וירא יוסף אתם את-בנימין ויאמר לאשר על-ביתו הבא את-האנשים
הביתה וטבח טבח והכן כי אתי יאכלו האנשים בצהרים:

When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to his house steward, "Take the men into the house; slaughter and prepare an animal, for the men will dine with me at noon." (Genesis 43:16)

When the brothers arrive in Egypt, they are immediately called to Pharaoh's house. The brothers assume that Pharaoh's agent (Joseph) calls them to demand an explanation for the disappearance of the last payment. If they do not have a good explanation, they fear that he would never agree to make a deal with them.

ויאמרו בי אדני ירדנו בתחלה לשבר-אכל ויהי כי-באנו
אל-המלון ונפתחה את-אמתחתינו והנה כסף-איש בפי אמתחתו
כספנו במשקלו ונשב אתו בידנו.

"If you please my lord," they said, "We came down once before to procure food. But when we arrived at the night encampment and opened our bags, there was each one's money in the mouth of his bag, our money in full. So we have brought it back with us. And we have brought down with us other money to procure food. We do not know who put the money in our bags."
(Genesis 43:20-22)

Obviously, Joseph is not at all concerned about the disappearance of the money, for he knows that the brothers did not deceive him. Rather, he is more concerned about the arrival of his youngest brother and about his father:

ויאמר שלום לכם אל-תיראו אלהיכם ואלהי אביכם נתן לכם מטמון
באמתחתכם כספכם בא אלי ויוצא אלהם את-שמעון:

He replied, "All is well with you, do not be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, must have put treasure in your bags for you. I got your payment." And he brought out Simeon to them. (Genesis 43:23)

Joseph reassures them that he did in fact receive payment for the goods rendered. Additionally, he brings Simeon to them as an act of good faith. Even though his brother has not yet been presented to him as he originally requested, he must see Benjamin standing before him with the rest of the brothers, and he knows that they have fulfilled their part of the contract. His only concern is to be reunited with his brother, and to hear about his father:

וישאל להם לשלום ויאמר השלום אביכם הזקן אשר אמרתם
העורנו חי:

"He greeted them, and he said, 'How is your aged father of whom we spoke? Is he still in good health?'" (Genesis 43:27). The brothers respond accordingly, once again assuming that

this is part of the negotiation process necessary to receive the rations. They answer him

ויאמרו שלום לעבדך לאבינו עודנו חי וקדו וישתחו+וישתחו+:

"They replied, 'It is well with your servant our father, he is still in good health.' And they bowed and made obeisance" (Genesis 43:28) Joseph cannot contain his excitement any longer, and asks about his younger brother

וישא עיניו וירא את-בנימין אחיו בן-אמו ויאמר הזה אחיכם
הקטן אשר אמרתם אלי ויאמר אלהים יחנך בני:

Looking about, he saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and asked, "Is this your youngest brother of whom you spoke to me?" And he went on, "May God be gracious to you, my boy" (Genesis 43:29)

Joseph cannot control his emotions--he does not personify a powerful and successful corporate vice-president. This is the personal, emotional side of Joseph that we have rarely encountered in the text. However, his brothers are *still* in business mode--they must complete their transaction and return home, if only to save Judah's honor.

וירחץ פניו ויצא ויתאפק ויאמר שימו לחם:

"Then he washed his face, reappeared, and--now in control of himself--gave the order, 'Serve the meal'" (Genesis 43:31). Joseph collects himself and now continues as if he is willing to make the transaction with them. He commands his servants to fill their bags with rations, but he also directs them to place a valuable object into Benjamin's sack.

ויצו את-אשר על-ביתו לאמר מלא את-אמתחת האנשים אכל כאשר
יוכלון שאת ושים כסף-איש בפי אמתחתו ואת-גביעי גביע הכסף
תשים בפי אמתחת הקטן ואת כסף שברו ויעש כדבר יוסף
אשר דבר:

Then he instructed his house steward as follows, "Fill the men's bags with

good, as much as they can carry, and put each one's money in the mouth of his bag. Put my silver goblet in the mouth of the bag of the youngest one, together with his money for the rations." And they did as Joseph told them (Genesis 44:1-2)

Joseph's motives are purely personal. This is all part of an elaborate plan to test whether his brothers have changed their ethical and moral standards since he last knew them in Canaan. Immediately after they leave, he instructs his stewards to pursue his brothers, capture, and return them for questioning.

הם יצאו את-העיר לא הרחיקו ויוסף אמר לאשר על-ביתו קום
רדף אחרי האנשים והשנתם ואמרת אלם למח שלמחם רעה תחת
טובה: הלא זה אשר ישתה אדני בו והוא נחש נחש בו הרעתם אשר
עשיתם:

They had just left the city and had not gone far, when Joseph said to his steward, "Up, go after the men! And when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why did you repay good with evil? It is the very one from which my master drinks and which he uses for divination. It was a wicked thing for you to do!'" (Genesis 44:4-5)

The brothers claim no knowledge of this theft. They argue that if they were thieves, they would never have returned to Egypt in the first place, for they assumed that they Egyptians thought they were thieves anyway! Moreover, they brought the money back in order to repay Pharaoh--they could not be thieves. They have made every attempt to be honest in their dealings from the moment they met Joseph in Egypt. However, if Joseph verifies that indeed one of them stole, they negotiate that the one who stole should be put to death, and the rest shall become slaves to Joseph.

ויאמרו אליו למח ידבר אדני כדברים האלה חלילה לעבדיך
מעשות כדבר הזה: הן כסף אשר מצאנו בפי אמתחתינו השיבנו
אליך מארץ כנען ואיך נגנב מבית אדניך כסף או זהב:

And they said to him, "Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything of the kind! Here we brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money that we found in the mouths of our bags. How then could we have stolen any silver or gold from your master's house! Whichever of your servants it is found with shall die; the rest of us, moreover, shall become slaves to my lord" (Genesis 44:7-9)

The proposal that Joseph makes is more lenient than the one that the brothers submit. Recall that Joseph's motives are still personal—he might have wanted to reserve the option of taking his brother Benjamin back with him to Egypt, sending the rest on their way. They had fulfilled their obligation to bring back his mother's son, and Joseph might not have seen another reason to delay them any longer.

ויאמר גם-עתה כדבריהם כן-הוא אשר ימצא אתו יהיה-לי עבד
ואתם תהיו נקיים.

He replied, "Although what you are proposing is right, only the one with whom it is found shall be my slave; but the rest of you shall go free." (Genesis 44:10)

Joseph has no interest in his brothers any longer. He and his servants search the brother's belongings, and the cup is found in Benjamin's sack, to the shock and utter surprise of his brothers.

ויאמר להם יוסף מה-המעשה הזה אשר עשיתם הלוא ידעתם
כי-נחש ינחש איש אשר כמני:

Joseph said to them, "What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me practices divination?" (Genesis 44:15)

Rashi says that when Joseph proclaims that he practices divination, he means to say, "Do you really think that you can cheat a man like me?"⁴⁹ Once again, Joseph implies that they are

⁴⁹ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II*, ר"ג.

dishonest dealers. Judah realizes that if Benjamin does not return with them, his personal honor will be jeopardized, for he has placed it as collateral with his father. He begins to plead with Joseph:

ויאמר יהודה מה - נאמר לאדני מה-נדרבר ומה-נצטרך האלהים
מצא את-עון עבדיך הננו עבדים לאדני גם-אנחנו גם אשר - נמצא
הגביע בידו:

Judah replied, "What can we say to my lord? How can we plead, how can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered the crime of your servants. Here we are, then, slaves of my lord, the rest of us as much as he in whose possession the goblet was found" (Genesis 44:16)

Judah pleads with Joseph, but to no avail. Joseph's response is deliberate. He is creating a situation where the brothers must face the loss of the youngest child as their responsibility. They will face their father's wrath--this time *they* are in charge of the younger brother, and they will be to blame if he does not arrive home unharmed. They will be forced to take responsibility for their actions, and Judah will lose his valuable collateral.

ויאמר חלילה לי מעשות זאת האיש אשר נמצא הגביע בידו
הוא יהיה-לי עבד ואתם עלו לשלום אל-אביכם:

But he replied, "Far be it from me to act thus! Only he in whose possession the goblet was found shall be my slave; the rest of you go back in peace to your father." (Genesis 44:17)

Judah makes a long and impassioned speech in order to modify Joseph's terms. He recounts the entire episode from his perspective, and then pleads with Joseph to allow them to remain as slaves rather than to return to their father's anguish:

ויגש אליו יהודה ויאמר בי אדני ידבר-נא עבדך דבר באזני אדני
 ואל-יחר אפך בעבדך כי כמוך כפרעה: אדני שאל את-עבדיו
 לאמר היש-לכם אב או-אח: ונאמר אל-אדני יש-לנו אב זקן וילד
 זקנים קטן ואחיו מת ויותר הוא לבדו לאמו ואביו אהבו: ותאמר
 אל-עבדיך הורדו אלי ואשימה עיני עלי: ונאמר אל-אדני
 לא-יוכל הנער לעזב את-אביו ועזב את-אביו ומת: ותאמר
 אל-עבדיך אם-לא ירד אחיכם הקטן אתכם לא תספון לראות פני:
 ויהי כי עלינו אל-עבדך אבי ונגד-לו את דברי אדני: ויאמר אבינו
 שבו שברו-לנו מעט-אכל: ונאמר לא נוכל לרדת אם-יש אחינו הקטן
 אתנו וירדנו כי-לא נוכל לראות פני האיש ואחינו הקטן איננו אתנו:
 ויאמר עבדך אבי אלינו אתם ידעתם כי שנים ילדה-לי אשתי: ויצא
 האחד מאתי ואמר אך טרף טרף ולא ראיתיו עד-הנה: ולקחתם
 גם-את-זה מעם פני וקרהו אסון והורדתם את-שיבתי ברעה שאלה:
 ועתה כבאי אל-עבדך אבי והנער איננו אתנו ונפשו קשורה בנפשו:
 והיה כראותו כי-אין הנער ומת והורידו עבדיך את-שיבתי עבדך
 אבינו ביגון שאלה: כי עבדך ערב את-הנער מעם אבי לאמר
 אם-לא אביאנו אליך וחטאתי לאבי כל-הימים: ועתה ישב-נא
 עבדך תחת הנער עבד לאדני והנער יעל עם-אחיו: כי-איך אעלה
 אל-אבי והנער איננו אתי פן אראה ברע אשר ימצא את-אבי:

Then Judah went up to him and said, "Please my lord, let your servant appeal to my lord, and do not be impatient with your servant, you who are the equal of Pharaoh. My lord asked of his servants, 'Have you a father or another brother? We told my lord, 'We have an old father, and there is a child of his old age, the youngest; his full brother is dead, so that he alone is left of his mother, and his father dotes on him. Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set eyes on him.' We said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father, if he were to leave him, his father would die.' But you said to your servants, 'Unless your younger brother comes down with you, do not let me see your faces.' When we came back to your servant my father, we reported my lord's words to him. Later our father said, 'Go back and procure some food for us.' We answered, 'We cannot go down, for we may not show our faces to the man unless our youngest brother is with us. Your servant my father said to us, 'As you know, my wife bore me two sons. But one is gone from me, and I said: Alas, he was torn by a beast! And I have not seen him since. I you take this one from me, too, and he meets with disaster, you will send my white head down to Shaol in sorrow.' Now, if I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us--since his own life is so bound up with

his--when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will send the white head of your servant our father down to Sheol in grief. 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.' Therefore please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord instead of the boy, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father unless the boy is with me? Let me not be witness to the woe that would overtake my father!" (Genesis 44:18-34)

In Judah's lengthy speech both Joseph and the reader sympathize with Jacob and his fate to an extent that is unprecedented in the story. In addition, Judah becomes a much more attractive character because of the responsibility he takes upon himself with regard to Benjamin and his father.⁵⁰ He speaks for himself and for his brothers, and his speech reflects love instead of sibling hatred. Judah displays the art of the "interpreter," speaking and quoting with skill. His speech is essentially a commentary on the words of other speakers. The presentation of these quotations is part of Judah's strategy of self-effacement. The purpose of Judah's words is to persuade Joseph to give up his control over their affairs (and return it to God). Both the audience and Joseph become aware of the maturity of Judah through his speech. But even in this case the shared perspective is brief, for the reader knows more about both characters than either knows about the other. Judah does not know Joseph's true identity, and Joseph must be sure that Judah's intentions are for the good of Benjamin and not for his own good. He succeeds in this endeavor--in fact, Rashi states that at first Judah spoke softly and humbly, because he remembered his own crime against Joseph. But when he realized that the punishment was to fall on his younger brother Benjamin, he spoke angrily

⁵⁰ Savran 85.

and so loudly that his voice echoed throughout the land of Egypt.⁵¹ Then his brother Joseph prepares to reveal his true identity to his brothers:

ולא יכל יוסף להתאפק לכל הנצבים עליו ויקרא הוציאו כל-איש מעל ולא-עמד איש אתו בהתורע יוסף אל-אחיו ויתן את-קלו בבכי וישמעו מצרים וישמע בית פרעה ויאמר יוסף אל-אחיו אני יוסף העוד אבי חי ולא יכלו אחיו לענות אתו כי נבחרו מפניו ויאמר יוסף אל-אחיו גשו-נא אלי ויגשו ויאמר אני יוסף אחיכם אשר מכרתם אתי מצרימה ועתה אל-תעצבו ואל-יחר בעיניכם כי-מכרתם אתי הנה כי למחיה שלחני אלהים לפניכם כי-זה שנתים הרעב בקרב הארץ ועוד חמש שנים אשר אין-חריש וקציר וישלחני אלהים לשום לכם שארית בארץ ולהחיות לכם לפליטה גדלה ועתה לא-אתם שלחתם אתי הנה כי האלהים וישימני לאב לפרעה ולאדון לכל-ביתנומשל בכל-ארץ מצרים: מהרו ועלו אל-אבי ואמרתם אליו כה אמר בנך יוסף שמני אלהים לאדון לכל-מצרים רדה אלי אל-תעמד וישבת בארץ-גשן וחיית קרוב אלי אתה ובניך ובניך ובצאנך ובקרך וכל-אשר-לך: וכל אשר-לך והנה עיניכם ראות ועיני אחי בנימין כי-פי המדבר אליכם והגדתם לאבי את-כל-כבודי במצרים ואת כל-אשר ראיתם ומהרתם והורדתם את-אבי הנה:

Joseph could no longer control himself before all of his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone withdraw from me!"... Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come forward to me." And when they came forward he said, "I am your brother Joseph, he whom you sold into Egypt. Now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me hither; it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you. It is now two years that there has been famine in the land, and there are still five years to come in which there shall be no yield from tilling. God has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival on earth, and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance. So, it is not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his household, and ruler over the whole land of Egypt. Now, hurry back to my father and say to him: Thus says your son Joseph, 'God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me without delay. You will dwell in the region of Goshen, where you will be near me--you and your children and your

⁵¹ *Torat Chayim, Bereshit 11, רכא.*

grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all that is yours. There I will provide for you--for there are yet five years of famine to come--that you and your household and all that is yours may not suffer want." You can see for yourselves, and my brother Benjamin for himself, that it is indeed I who am speaking to you. And you must tell my father everything about my high station in Egypt and all that you have seen, and bring my father here with all speed." (Genesis 45:1-13)

Joseph first faces his brothers in bitterness and plays games with them in order to find revenge against them, but at this point, having worked out his feelings towards his father and his brothers, he is ready for reconciliation, and acts accordingly. Then, Joseph goes back into his business mode. First he explains to the brothers that they should not feel guilty about their actions toward him, for it was part of a plan that was out of their control. The intention of the plan was to save the family from the famine. Then, he begins to make plans to assist the family. Ramban says that when Joseph uses the phrase **פן-תורש אתה וביתך** ("that you and your house will not suffer want") he tells his father that he would like to send the food to his father without requiring his father to journey down to Egypt, however, this is not feasible. For to do so might raise Pharaoh's suspicions that he is selling rations to the land of Canaan in order to make his own profits and to build his own treasury. However, if Jacob and his sons come down to Egypt, Pharaoh will see that they are his family and will not have any suspicions of any improper use of the rations of which he is in control.⁵² Pharaoh hears about the incident and approaches Joseph, telling him:

ויאמר פרעה אל-יוסף אמר אל-אחייך זאת עשו טענו את-בעירכם ולכו-באו ארצה כנען: וקחו את-אביכם ואת-בתיכם ובאו אלי ואתנה לכם את-טוב ארץ מצרים ואכלו את-חלב הארץ: ואתה צויתח זאת

⁵² *Torat Chaim, Bereshit 11*, רכב.

עשו-קחו לכם מארץ מצרים עגלות לטפכם ולנשיכם ונשא את-אביכם ובאתם. ועינכם אל-חכם על-כליכם כי-טוב כל-ארץ מצרים לכם הוא.

And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do as follows. load up your beasts and go at once to the land of Canaan. Take your father and your households and come to me, I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you shall live off the fat of the land. And you are bidden [to add], 'Do as follows: take from the land of Egypt wagons for your children and your wives, and bring your father here. And never mind your belongings, for the best of all the land of Egypt shall be yours.'" (Genesis 45:17-20)

Pharaoh acts just as Joseph has predicted, by not sending sustaining rations to his family in Canaan, Joseph ensures that the Pharaoh is not alarmed and not suspicious, and Pharaoh rewards him by offering to hosts Joseph's family and to send a tribute Joseph's father. His brothers return with the surprising reports:

ויגדו לו לאמר עוד יוסף חי וכי-הוא משל בכל-ארץ מצרים ויפג לבו כי לא-האמין להם:

And they told him, "Joseph is still alive; yes, he is ruler over the whole land of Egypt." (Genesis 45:26)

ויאמר ישראל רב עוד - יוסף בני חי אלקה ואראנו בטרם אמות

"Enough!" said Israel. "My son Joseph is still alive! I must go and see him before I die!" (Genesis 45:28)

Jacob and his sons go to Egypt to see Joseph. Joseph and his father greet each other warmly, and then Joseph returns to the issue of settlement and acquisition of land rights for his family. For the first time, Joseph prepares a scheme with his brothers so that they will receive preferential treatment:

ויאמר יוסף אל-אחיו ואל-בית אביו אעלה ואגידה לפרעה ואמרה

אליו אחי ובית-אבי אשר בארץ-כנען באו אליהם אנשים רעי צאן
 כי-אנשי מקנה היו וצאנם ובקרם וכל-אשר להם הביאו והיה
 כי-יקרא לכם פרעה ואמר מה-מעשיכם ואמרתם אנשי מקנה היו
 עבדיך מנעורינו ועד-עתה גם-אנחנו גם-אבותינו בעבור תשבו
 בארץ נשן כי-תועבת מצרים כל-רעה צאן.

Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell the news to Pharaoh, and say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me. The men are shepherds, they have always been the breeder of livestock, and they have brought with them their flocks and herds and all that is theirs.' So when Pharaoh summons you and asks, 'What is your occupations?' you shall answer, 'Your servants have been breeders of livestock from the start until now, both we and our fathers'--so that you may stay in the region of Goshen. For all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians." (Genesis 46:31-34)

Heskoni says that Joseph's self-interest is emphasized in this passage--more than his brothers. Joseph does not wish for the other ministers in Pharaoh's court to know his brother's occupation, for as he tells his family, herding is a loathsome occupation. He does not want to give his political opponents ammunition against him.⁵³ He wants to preserve his power, not undermine his high rank in the court. Joseph refrains from explaining his reasons to his brothers, yet makes it clear that this is for their best interests. Joseph implements his part of the plan. He goes to Pharaoh, and speaks to him about his family's arrival. He informs Pharaoh about his family's present location and possessions:

ויבא יוסף ויגד לפרעה ויאמר אבי ואחי וצאנם ובקרם וכל-אשר
 להם באו מארץ כנען והנם בארץ נשן:

Then Joseph came and reported to Pharaoh, saying, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that is theirs, have come from the land of Canaan and are now in the region of Goshen." (Genesis 47:1)

⁵³ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit II*, רלו.

Pharaoh meets with a few--selected and instructed by Joseph--and Pharaoh questions them as Joseph has already predicted.

ויאמר פרעה אל-אחיו מה-מעשיכם.

"Pharaoh said to his brothers, 'What is your occupation?'" (Genesis 47:3) The brothers answer, however, they do not comply with Joseph's request. Furthermore, neither they nor the narration provide an explanation for this action. The brothers answer truthfully and even suggest where they would like to settle with the permission of the Pharaoh:

ויאמרו אל-פרעה רעה צאן עבדיך גם-אנחנו גם-אבותינו: ויאמר אל-פרעה לגור בארץ באנו כי אין מרעה לצאן אשר לעבדיך כי-כבר הרעב בארץ כנען ועתה ישבו נא עבדיך בארץ גשן:

They answered Pharaoh, "We your servants are shepherds, as were also our fathers. We have come," they told Pharaoh, "to sojourn in this land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, the famine being severe in the land of Canaan. Pray, then, let your servants stay in the region of Goshen." (Genesis 47:4)

Joseph is silent--never in the discourse nor in the narrative does Joseph reprimand his brothers for their non-compliance. Perhaps they determined that Joseph's request was motivated by self-interest and not for their benefit as he implied. They must have thought that it was odd that Pharaoh responds to them positively, allowing them to settle in Goshen as they have requested. Furthermore, Pharaoh offers employment to those that Joseph deems qualified.

ויאמר פרעה אל-יוסף לאמר אביך ואחיו באו אליך ארץ מצרים לפניך הוא במיטב: הארץ הושב את-אביך ואת-אחיו ישבו בארץ גשן ואם-ירעת ויש-בם אנשי-חיל ושמם שרי מקנה על-אשר-לי:

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "As regards your father and your brothers who have come to you, the land of Egypt is open before you: settle your father and brothers in the best part of the land; let them stay in the region of Goshen. And if you know any capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock." (Genesis 47:5-6)

Joseph introduces Pharaoh to his father, and Pharaoh asks him a rather mundane question

ויאמר פרעה אל-יעקב כמה ימי שני חיך:

"Pharaoh asked Jacob, 'How many are the years of your life?'" (Genesis 47:8) S'forno says that this question was motivated by the fact that Jacob is such an old man with such young children. There is no reason for the question other than personal curiousness on the part of the Pharaoh.⁵⁴ Jacob answers his question with more information than Pharaoh requested

ויאמר יעקב אל-פרעה ימי מגורי שלשים ומאת שנה מעט
ורעים היו ימי שני חי ואלא חשיגו את-ימי שני חי אבתי בימי
מגוריהם:

And Jacob answered Pharaoh, "The years of my sojourn [on earth] are one hundred and thirty. Few and hard have been the years of my life, nor do they come up to the life spans of my fathers during their sojourns." (Genesis 47:9)

With this melancholy and sorrowful reply, the story of Joseph and his brothers concludes momentarily. Joseph clearly states that by selling him into slavery, they insured the survival and economic stability of the family, and of the whole Egyptian nation. He rose to a high position in Pharaoh's court, and his family benefited--economically and otherwise--because of his status.

♦ JOSEPH AND THE PEOPLE

Joseph turns his attentions to the people of Egypt, who are not faring as well as one would expect. The severity of the famine is so pronounced that the inhabitants rely solely on the government to take care of their needs. The people come before Joseph and beg for state

⁵⁴ *Torat Chaim*, Bereshit II, רלח.

assistance:

ויתם הכסף מארץ מצרים ומארץ כנען ויבאו כל-מצרים אל-יוסף
לאמר הבה-לנו לחם ולמה נמות נדרך כי אפס כסף: ויאמר יוסף
הבו מקניכם ואתנה לכם במקניכם אם-אפס כסף

And when the money gave out in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us bread, lest we die before your very eyes, for the money is gone!" And Joseph said, "Bring your livestock, and I will sell to you against your livestock, if the money is gone."
(Genesis 47:15-16)

Joseph rises to the opportunity and prevents a national catastrophe by using their livestock as collateral against their debts to the state, thereby deterring the onset of famine in the land that he worked so hard to prevent. This temporarily prevented disaster from befalling the Egyptians, but once they had relinquished their cattle in exchange for bread, they presumably knew that they approaching the most difficult part of the famine yet. What other assets did they have besides their land--and themselves?

ותתם השנה ההוא ויבאו אליו בשנה השנית ויאמרו לו לא-נכחד
מאדני כי אם-תם הכסף ומקנה הבהמה אל-אדני לא נשאר לפני
אדני בלתי אם-גוייתנו ואדמתנו: למה נמות לעיניך גם-אנחנו גם
אדמתנו קנה-אתנו ואת-אדמתנו בלחם ונחיה אנחנו ואדמתנו
עבדים לפרעה ותן-זרע ונחיה ולא נמות והאדמה לא תשם:

And when that year was ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, "We cannot hide from my lord that, with all the money and animal stocks consigned to my lord, nothing is left at my lord's disposal save our persons and our farmland. Let us not perish before your eyes, both we and our land. Take us and our land in exchange for bread, and we with our land will be serfs to Pharaoh; provide the seed, that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become a waste." (Genesis 47:18-19)

They offered their own selves into servitude in order to prevent starving to death. They developed an logical economic plan that was acceptable to Joseph, so he agrees on behalf of

Pharaoh. Joseph extends and defines the terms of the agreement, providing taxation figures that sounded more than reasonable to the inhabitants of the land

ויאמר יוסף אל-העם הן קניתי אתכם היום ואת-אדמתכם לפרעה
הא-לכם זרע וזרעתם את-האדמה; והיה בתבואת ונתתם חמישית
לפרעה וארבע היות יהיה לכם לזרע חשדה ולאכלכם ולאשר
בבתיכם ולאכל לטפכם.

Then Joseph said to the people, "Whereas I have this day acquired you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you to sow the land. And when harvest comes, you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be yours as seed for the fields and as food for you and those in your households, and as nourishment for your children. (Genesis 47:23-24)

ויאמרו החיתנו נמצא - הן בעיני אדני והיינו עבדים לפרעה:

And they said, "You have saved our lives! We are grateful to my lord, and we shall be serfs to Pharaoh." (Genesis 47:25)

The newly acclaimed serfs accepted the new contract gladly. There are remnants of the conversation that transpires between Jacob and his brother Esau as they bargained over the red pottage. Both Esau and the Egyptians are "starving"--the first and foremost concern on their minds was how to obtain sustenance. Esau, miserable and famished, pleads with his brother as if he will die if he does not eat--just as the Egyptians plead. Yet to the reader's ears, Esau's petitions seem contrived, while one has the sense that the Egyptians are truly at a moment of life and death. Jacob forces Esau into a deal that will eventually destroy their relationship altogether, while Joseph saves lives (according to the people themselves). We should note that Joseph's deal with the people will more likely than not prove advantageous for Pharaoh's accounts, but it does not appear that Joseph made the deal solely based on financial considerations.

♦ JACOB on his DEATHBED

The family is reunited for a short while before Jacob prepares to die. He calls Joseph to his side:

ויקרא ימי-ישראל למות ויקרא לבנו ליוסף ויאמר לו אם-נא מצאתי חן בעיניך שים-נא ירך תחת ירכי ועשית עמדי חסד ואמת אל-נא תקברני במצרים: ושכבתי עם-אבתי ונשאתני ממצרים וקברתני בקברתם ויאמר אנכי אעשה כדברך:

And when the time approached for Israel to die, he summoned his son Joseph and said to him, "Do me this favor, place your hand under my thigh as a pledge of your steadfast loyalty: please do not bury me in Egypt. When I lie down with my fathers, take me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial-place." (Genesis 47:29-30)

Jacob feels an obligation to continue the covenant that was formed by his grandfather Abraham, and continued by his father Isaac. He makes Joseph swear that he will not be buried in this country--that Joseph will make sure his remains are buried with his father and grandfather. Joseph agrees to this promise:

ויאמר השבעה לי וישבע לו וישתחו ישראל על-ראש המטה:

He replied, "I will do as you have spoken." And he said, "Swear to me." (Genesis 47:31)

But Jacob demands that Joseph take an oath to this effect. In order to assure his father that he truly would adhere to his wishes, he swears to him that his wish would be respected. When Jacob dies, Joseph goes to Pharaoh and spoke to Pharaoh about the matter

וימלאו-לו ארבעים יום כי כן ימלאו ימי החנטים ויבכו אתו מצרים שבעים יום: ויעברו ימי בכיתו וידבר יוסף אל-בית פרעה לאמר אם-נא מצאתי חן בעיניכם דברו-נא באזני פרעה לאמר: אבי השביעני לאמר הנה אנכי מת בקברי אשר כרית לי בארץ כנען שמה תקברני ועתה אעלה-נא ואקברה את-אבי ואשובה:

The Egyptians bewailed him seventy days, and when the wailing period was over, Joseph spoke to Pharaoh's court, saying, "Do me this favor, and lay this appeal before Pharaoh: 'My father made me swear, saying, "I am about to die. Be sure to bury me in the grave which I made ready for myself in the land of Canaan." Now, therefore, let me go up and bury my father, then I shall return.'" (Genesis 50:3-5)

This request is presented in such a way as to ensure Pharaoh's agreement to the up and coming journey to Canaan. Once again, we note how Joseph understands how one is supposed to speak to Pharaoh. From the first time Joseph addressed Pharaoh until this moment, Pharaoh has agreed to every request. This ability to speak to his superior is an essential business skill that serves Joseph well. Furthermore, in this passage we may also sense a deep sense of responsibility to his father. Pharaoh seems to sense this commitment too, as he tells Joseph to do as he has said:

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה עֲלֵה וקבר את - אביך כאשר השביעך:

And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you promise on oath." (Genesis 50:6)

וַיִּצְווּ אֶל-יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר אביך צוּה לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ לֵאמֹר: כֹּה-תֹאמְרוּ לְיוֹסֵף אֲנֵה שֶׁאֵין נָא יוֹסֵף בְּדִבְרֵם אֵלָיו: פֶּשַׁע אַחִיךָ וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי-רָעָה גַּמְלוֹךְ וְעַתָּה שֶׁאֵין לִפְשַׁע עַבְדֵי אֱלֹהֵי אביך וּבְךָ

So they sent this message to Joseph. "Before his death your father left this instruction: So shall you say to Joseph, 'Forgive, I urge you, the offence and guilt of your brothers who treated you so harshly.' Therefore, please forgive the offense of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph was in tears as they spoke to him." (Genesis 50:16-17)

Now that Jacob is gone, the brothers fear recriminations from Joseph. Therefore, they "quote" their father. The brothers tell Joseph that his father requested that he should not take

revenge against his brothers for selling him into slavery. There is no record of such a statement earlier in the story--and we are provided with another unverifiable piece of direct discourse. The nature of this comment, together with the stated motivations of the brothers in 50:15, points to the conclusion that this statement has been fabricated by the brothers. Jacob has no reason to suspect Joseph of insincerity, nor is it clear that he was ever aware of the brothers' mistreatment of Joseph. Should the reader "believe" that Jacob spoke these words? Joseph tries to curtail the conversation--telling his brothers that the offences of the past were no longer consequential.

וילכו גם-אחיו ויפלו לפניו ויאמרו הננו לך לעבדים:

His brothers went to him themselves, flung themselves before him, and said,
"We are prepared to be your slaves" (Genesis 50:18)

ויאמר אלהם יוסף אל-תיראו כי התחת אלהים אני: ואתם חשבתם עלי רעה אלהים חשבה לטובה למען עשה כיום הזה להחית עם-רבי: ועתה אל-תיראו אנכי אכלכל אתכם ואת-טפכם וינחם אותם וידבר על-לבם:

But Joseph said to them, "Have no fear! Am I a substitute for God? Besides, although you intended me harm, God intended it for good, so as to bring about the present result--the survival of many people. And so, fear not. I will sustain you and your children." Thus he reassured them, speaking kindly to them. (Genesis 50:19-21)

Joseph had either utterly and completely absolved his brothers for their actions, or had perfected the ability to impart flawless Jewish guilt. Although there is no further record of direct discourse between the brothers, one might expect that they would be eternally grateful to his benevolent brother Joseph. His keen sense of commerce saved the lives of countless people, including the lives of his own family.

The Book of Exodus

◆ PHARAOH DECREES SLAVERY

The newly established community of Israelites in Egypt flourishes, and their numbers grow tremendously in the course of the years. The sacred promise to the patriarchs that their descendants would become numerous was more than adequately realized. The Israelites become a "great nation." The pharaoh at that time "who did not know Joseph" notices that the numbers of Israelites in the land increases beyond expectation. When he realizes that this people might very well outnumber his own, he devises a plan in order to arrest their immense growth:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-עַמּוֹ הַנֶּה עַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעִצּוֹם מִמֶּנּוּ: הֲבֵנָה נִתְחַכְמָה
לּוֹ פֶּן-יִרְבֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי-תִקְרָאנָה מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסֶף גַּם-הוּא עַל-שְׂנְאֵינוּ
וְנִלְחַם-בָּנוּ וְעָלָה מִן-הָאָרֶץ:

And he said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us. Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise from the ground." (Exodus 1:9-10)

When the pharaoh states that he wishes to "deal shrewdly" with the Israelites, he means to say that he wants to force them to enter into a form of state slavery which may be defined as:

the organized imposition of forced labor upon the male population for long and indefinite terms of service under degrading and brutal conditions. The men so conscripted received no reward for their labors, they enjoyed no civil rights, and their lot was generally much worse than that of a household slave. Organized in large work gangs, they became an anonymous mass, depersonalized, losing all individuality in the eyes of their oppressors.⁵⁵

⁵⁵Sarna, Exploring Exodus, 21.

He decides to impose hard labor on these people, exploiting this select population for the good of the regime. Nachmonides also believes that Pharaoh began his campaign against the Israelites for economic and strategic reasons. He states that the king was afraid that the Israelites would join an invading army and escape with a significant portion of Egypt's wealth. Instead of killing off the Israelites, Pharaoh cleverly develops a plan for taxing their property and for putting them to work on his projects. In this manner all of Egypt prospered from the enslavement of the Israelites.

◆ MOSES FIGHTS FOR JUSTICE

Moses, having witnessed the injustices done to the Israelites, cannot tolerate the sight of an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. In place of a formal system of democratic justice, Moses takes matters in his own hands, strikes down the persecutor and buries him in the sand. When he performs this action, he clearly chooses to associate with the Israelites. Later, he admonishes a Hebrew slave for feuding with another Hebrew slave:

ויצא ביום השני והנה שני-אנשים עברים נצים ויאמר לרשע
למה תכה רעך:

When he went out the next day, he found two Hebrews fighting; so he said to the offender, "Why do you strike your fellow?" (Exodus 2:13)

But the offender responds:

ויאמר מי שמך לאיש שר ושפט עלינו הלהרגני אתה אמר כאשר הרגת
את-המצרי ויירא משה ויאמר אכן נודע הדבר:

He retorted, "Who made you chief and ruler over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses was frightened, and thought: Then the matter is known! (Exodus 2:14)

From this comment, Moses knows that people are aware that he is a murderer--that he killed the Egyptian task master. The matter is common knowledge, and Moses flees into the wilderness to take refuge in the territory of the Midianites. Although this episode does not show Moses making a contract or other sort of agreement with another party, it is business oriented. Moses questions the authority of the ruling government, and sets the scene for a massive Israelite revolution that will occur subsequent to his return from exile. Once he returns, he will have substantial power (bestowed on him by God) and will be in a position to make significant arrangements with Pharaoh pertaining to the future employment status of the Israelites.

♦ MOSES GOES BACK TO EGYPT

After speaking with God, Moses goes to his father-in-law to ask for permission to go back to Egypt:

וילך משה וישב אל-יתר חתנו ויאמר אלכה נא ואשובה לו אל-אחי
אשר-במצרים ואראה העודם חיים ויאמר יתרו למשה לך לשלום:

Moses went back to his father-in-law Jethro and said to him, "Let me go back to my kinsmen in Egypt and see how they are faring." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace." (Exodus 4:18)

By marrying into Jethro's family, he enters into an employment contract with the head of the family which has an implied term: that he must ask permission to leave before doing so. Basically, Moses asks for his father-in-law's permission because, according to Rashi, he had sworn to stay with him through his marriage to Zippora.⁵⁶ S'forno says that נא ואשובה

⁵⁶ *Torat Chaim, Shemot* 1, כמז.

אלכה (I will go and return [to Egypt]) can be understood as "I will go, but I will return, for I am leaving you my wife and my sons"⁵⁷ Nevertheless, he asks permission of his father-in-law, and receives an affirmative reply, לך לשרים (go in peace). He is given leave from his position with the Midianites. He will not receive benefits while he is away, and it is unclear if or when he will return.

♦ MOSES and AARON vs. PHARAOH

After Moses and Aaron receive their commission from God to free the Israelites from bondage, they have to establish themselves as God's agents. The challenge will be to establish God's superiority to the other gods (God is not the monopoly in this market) and to establish the nature of Moses' relationship with this deity. The agents go first to the Israelite people and rally support for God from the masses. Then, Moses and Aaron do as God commands: they go to the Pharaoh and demand a three day worship period for the Israelite people.

ואחר באו משה ואהרן ויאמרו אל-פרעה כה-אמר ידודאלהי ישראל שלח את-עמי ויחגו לי במדבר:

Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Let My people go that they may celebrate a festival for Me in the wilderness." (Exodus 5:1)

However, this God is an unknown entity to Pharaoh--there is a new contender in town. Pharaoh is not yet impressed by this new competition, and does not wish to be bothered by the two Hebrew slaves in his presence. What could they possibly possess (material or

⁵⁷ *Torat Chaim, Shemot I*, מרח.

otherwise) that could be valuable to such an important man as the ruler of Egypt?

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה מִי יִדְּוֶה אֲשֶׁר אֲשַׁמְעֵבְקָלוֹ לְשַׁלְחַת-יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִדְעֹתִי אֶת-יִדְּוֹד וְגַם אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא אֲשַׁלַּח.

But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD that I should heed Him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go." (Exodus 5:2)

But Moses and Aaron maintain that the God of the Hebrews has spoken to them, made them God's agents, and made them responsible for the welfare of the Israelite people. They do tell Pharaoh that he should follow God's commandment, but in these early stages of negotiations, they refrain from using a direct threat. Rather, they state that if God's command is not followed, they shall *all* suffer the consequences.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים נִקְרָא עֲלֵינוּ נִלְכָּה נֶאֱדָרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים
בְּמִדְבָּר וְנִזְבַּחַה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ פֶּן-יִפְגְּעֵנוּ בְּדִבְרֹךְ אוֹ בַּחֶרֶב:
וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לִמָּה מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֱלֹהִים תִּפְרִיעוּ אֶת-הָעָם
מִמַּעֲשֵׂיו לָכוּ לִסְבִּלְתֵּיכֶם: וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה הֵן-רַבִּים עֲתָה עִם הָאָרֶץ
וְהִשְׁבַּתֶּם אֹתָם מִסִּבְלָתָם.

They answered, "The God of the Hebrews has manifested Himself to us. Let us go, we pray, a distance of three days into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest He strikes *us* with pestilence or sword. Moses and Aaron, why do you distract the people from their tasks? Get to your labors!" And Pharaoh continued, "The people of the land are already so numerous, and you would have them cease from their labors!" (Exodus 5:3-5)

Pharaoh admonishes Moses and Aaron for disturbing the work of the Israelite slaves. Furthermore, he commands Moses and Aaron to return to their own tasks, reminding them that they too are slaves, and have no true power in this matter. Rashi comments on the second half of Pharaoh's statement. When Pharaoh reprimands the two agents of God for distracting the slaves from their work, he is telling them that the sheer numbers of slaves are so great that

a cessation in work causes the Pharaoh a significant financial damage. Therefore, Pharaoh lost profits as a result of Moses and Aaron's "antics".⁵⁸ Instead of trying to recover his losses through increased workload, he decides that it would be more advantageous to teach the Israelites a lesson, to insure that such an incident will not happen again.

ויצו פרעה ביום ההוא את-הנגשים בעם ואת-שטריו לאמר:
לאתאספון לחת תבן לעם ללבן הלבנים כתמול שלשם הם ילכו
וקששו להם תבן: ואת-מתכנת הלבנים אשר הם עשים תמול שלשם
תשימו עליהם לא תגרעו ממנו כי-גרפים הם על-כן הם צעקים
לאמר נלכה נזבחה לאלהינו.

That same day Pharaoh charged the taskmasters and foremen of the people, saying, "You shall no longer provide the people with straw for making bricks as heretofore; let them go and gather straw for themselves. But impose upon them the same quota of bricks as they have been making heretofore; do not reduce it, for they are shirkers; that is why they cry, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God!' Let heavier work be laid upon the men; let them keep at it and not pay attention to deceitful promises." (Exodus 5:6-9)

This is Pharaoh's move to discredit the messengers of God in the eyes of the masses. Pharaoh must maintain control over the Israelites, for their numbers still concerned the ruler. If Moses and Aaron succeed to convince the Israelites that they should strike or revolt, Pharaoh would have a difficult time controlling them. He would be forced to utilize a vast amount of resources in order to terminate a revolt. The taskmasters relay the news to the people that their quotas will remain the same, but that they would no longer be furnished with materials to complete their task:

ויצאו נגשי העם ושטריו ויאמרו אל-העם לאמר כה אמר פרעה
אינני נתן לכם תבן: אתם לכו קחו לכם תבן מאשר תמצאו כי אין
נגרע מעבודתכם דבר:

⁵⁸ *Torat Chaim, Shemot* I, נר.

So the taskmasters and foremen of the people went out and said to the people.
"Thus says Pharaoh: I will not give you any straw. You must go and get the
straw yourselves wherever you can find it, but there shall be no decrease
whatsoever in your work." (Exodus 5:10-11)

It was inconceivable that the workers could complete their quota without the proper material,
but they were punished nevertheless.

ויבאו שטרי בני ישראל אשר-שמו עליהם נגשי פרעה לאמר מדוע לא
כליתם חקכם ללבן כתמול שלשם גם-תמול גם-היום:

And the foremen of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over
them, were beaten. "Why" they were asked, "did you not complete the
prescribed amount of bricks, either yesterday or today, as you did before?"
(Exodus 5:14)

This question is slightly pretentious and rhetorical. No answer is given, nor is one necessarily
needed. The foremen are not to blame for the low rate of production--they were not given
enough time or resources to contend with the new conditions placed upon them. They were
not to blame--and they protested to Pharaoh for the unfair conditions that were required of
them. Notice that they complain specifically about the unfair treatment to which *they* were
subjected, and not about the unfair treatment of all of the Israelites. They speak to him as self-
representatives:

ויבאו שטרי בני ישראל ויצעקו אל-פרעה לאמר למה תעשה
כה לעבדיך: תבן אין נתן לעבדיך ולבנים אמרים לנו עשו והנה
עבדיך מכים וחטאת עמך:

Then the foremen of the Israelites came to Pharaoh and cried: "Why do you
deal thus with your servants? No straw is issued to your servants, yet they
demand of us: Make bricks! Thus your servants are being beaten, when the
fault is with your own people." (Exodus 5:15-16)

Pharaoh responds to them as he responded to Moses and Aaron. He speaks to them sternly and reiterates the demands: we will provide you with less materials, but you must produce the same amount of material.

ויבאו שטרי בני ישראל ויצעקו אל-פרעה לאמר למח תעשה
כה לעבדיך: תבן אין נתן לעבדיך ולבנים אמרים לנו עשו והנה
עבדיך מכים וחטאת עמך: ויאמר נרפים אתם נרפים על-כן אתם
אמרים נלכה נזבחה לידוד

He replied, "You are shirkers, shirkers! That is why you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.' Be off now to your work! No straw shall be issued to you, but you must produce your quota of bricks!" (Exodus 5:17-18)

S'forno says that Pharaoh contends that they are lazy. If they have this excess of time to go out to the wilderness and offer sacrifices to God, they must have plenty of excess time on a normal basis. Therefore, if their workload increases, they should not have difficulty in fulfilling the quota.⁹⁹ These unfortunate foremen happened to encounter Moses and Aaron as they emerged from the palace, and they verbalized their outrage and frustration upon the two:

ויאמרו אלם ירא ידוד עליכם וישפט אשר הבאשתם את-ריחנו
בעיני פרעה ובעיני עבדיו לתת-חרב בידם להרגנו:

And they said to them, "May the LORD look upon you and punish you for making us loathsome to Pharaoh and his courtiers--putting a sword in their hands to slay us." (Exodus 5:21)

Pharaoh succeeds to persuade the people that Moses and Aaron are responsible for their hardship. He uses the tactic of "divide and conquer" and probably assumes that he has controlled the crisis. Profoundly discouraged and disillusioned, Moses cries out to God and

⁹⁹ *Torat Chaim, Shemot I, נט.*

asks for guidance. In this moment of distress, God refrains from rebuking Moses for a lack of faith. Instead, God encourages him as to the ultimate victory of his mission that awaits.

After several plagues have already affected Egypt and Pharaoh finds himself humbled, he is ready to deal with the representatives of God. Pharaoh proposes a contract with the two that would satisfy the needs of the Israelites, but would only partially satisfy the needs of Pharaoh and his dominion:

וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְאַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמֶר הִעֲתִירוּ אֵלַי וְיִסְרֹף הַצְּפַרְדִּים מִמֶּנִּי וּמֵעַמִּי וְאֶשְׁלַח אֶת-הָעָם וַיּוֹבְחוּ לַיהוָה:

Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Plead with the LORD to remove the frogs from me and my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD." (Exodus 8:4)

This is the first time in the text that Pharaoh acknowledges the existence and the power of God (only to deny it shortly thereafter). Moses accepts Pharaoh's contract and adds a reward:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְפַרְעֹה הִתְפַּאֵר עָלַי לְמַתִּי אֶעֱתִיר לָךְ וְלַעֲבָדֶיךָ וְלַעֲמֶךָ לְחִבְרֵית הַצְּפַרְדִּים מִמֶּךָּ וּמִבְתֶּיךָ רַק בִּיָּאֵר תִּשְׁאֲרֶנָּה:

And Moses said to Pharaoh, "You may have this triumph over me: for what time shall I plead in behalf of you and your courtiers and your people, that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses, to remain only in the Nile?" "For tomorrow," he replied. (Exodus 8:5-6)

Moses, probably still concerned about proving his authority to Pharaoh, agrees to the contract, and coyly asks Pharaoh to designate the time his wishes the plagues to cease. Moses adds a bonus to the deal, to show Pharaoh that Moses truly had a measure of control in the situation—that God would respond to the request if it came from Moses.

ויאמר למחר ויאמר כדברך למען תדע כי - אין כידוד אלהינו:
וכרו הצפרדעים ממך ומבתיך ומעבדריך ומעמך רק ביאר
תשארה.

And [Moses] said, "As you say--that you may know that there is none like the LORD our God, the frogs shall retreat from you and your courtiers and your people; they shall remain only in the Nile" (Exodus 8:6-7)

Moses repeats Pharaoh's admission that there is a God and that God is powerful-- making his point abundantly clear: God has prevailed, Pharaoh has yielded. Moses completes his part of the deal, but Pharaoh breaches the contract, and refuses to allow the Israelites to worship to God. God sends another plague to Egypt in punishment for Pharaoh's violation. Once again, Pharaoh calls upon Moses and Aaron, telling them that he would like to renegotiate with them:

ויקרא פרעה אל-משה ולאהרן ויאמר לכו זבחו לאלהיכם בארץ:

Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Go and sacrifice to your God **within** the land." (Exodus 8:21)

Pharaoh makes a counter offer by changing the terms of the original agreement, allowing for worship within the area that he controls, but not outside of these parameters. However, these modifications are unacceptable to Moses (Aaron does not reply in this instance--one wonders if Aaron might have accepted this offer if Moses had not been present) who adheres to his original offer and he contends that only the original proposal will satisfy the requirements set forth by God:

ויאמר משה לא נכון לעשות כן כי תועבת מצרים נזבח לידוד
אלהינו הן נזבח את-תועבת מצרים לעיניהם ולא יסקלנו: דרך
שלוש ימים נלך במדבר וזבחנו לידוד אלהינו כאשר יאמר אלינו:

But Moses replied, "It would not be right to do this, for what we sacrifice to the LORD our God is untouchable to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice that which is untouchable to the Egyptians before their very eyes, will they not stone us? So we must go a distance of three days into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as He may command us." (Exodus 8:22-23)

Rashi says that the Israelites do not yet know what animals God will ask them to sacrifice. It may turn out to be one that Egyptians would regard as a sacrilegious provocation, given that their gods were represented by animals. The sight of the Israelites slaughtering and sacrificing such animals might enrage and provoke the Egyptians to kill the Israelites.⁶⁰ Since the Israelites were considered chattel by Pharaoh, this argument proved to be successful. Pharaoh consents, allowing them to go outside the confines of the controlled lands, but makes a small stipulation:

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֲנִי אֶשְׁלַח אֹתְכֶם וּזְבַחְתֶּם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
בְּמִדְבַּר רֶק הָרֶחֶק לֹא-תִרְחִיקוּ לִלְכַּת הָעֵתִירָו בְּעַדִּי:

Pharaoh said, "I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness, but do not go very far. Plead, then, for me." (Exodus 8:24)

Pharaoh asks them to **הֵעִתִּירוּ בְעַדִּי** (plead for me). Ibn Ezra says that these two words should have come at the beginning of the sentence, meaning "plead for me with your God to stop the plagues, and only then shall I send you to sacrifice in the wilderness, however, only on the condition that you should not travel more than three days distance from here."⁶¹ Pharaoh is concerned about his own welfare (yet he does not mention the welfare of his

⁶⁰ *Torat Chaim, Shemot I, צא*.

⁶¹ *Torat Chaim, Shemot I, צב*.

people--a direct contrast to Moses) and he asks for God to cease the destruction. Moses agrees to the terms, and tells Pharaoh that he will plead to God on behalf of the king, but that his patience will soon end.

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה הִנֵּה אֲנִי יֹצֵא מֵעִמְךָ וְהִתְרַחֵץ אֶל־יְדֹוֹד וְסָר הָעֶרֶב
מִפְּרֶעָה מֵעַבְדֶּיךָ וּמֵעַמּוֹ מִחַר רֶגֶל אֶל־יֹסֵף פְּרֶעָה הַתֵּל לְבַלְתִּי שְׁלַח
אֶת־הָעָם לִזְבַּח לַיהוָה.

And Moses said, "When I leave your presence, I will plead with the LORD that the swarms of insects depart tomorrow from Pharaoh and his courtiers and his people; but let not Pharaoh again act deceitfully, not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD." (Exodus 8:25)

Moses has an advantage in the negotiations at this point in time. Moses--as God's agent--controls the plagues. This advantage places pressure on Pharaoh. If one reads the text according to Ibn Ezra, Pharaoh does not want to contend with Moses from an inferior position. Therefore, instead of simply letting the Israelites go, which would alleviate the disaster caused by the plagues, Pharaoh continues to negotiate, demanding that God remove the plague before the people are allowed to worship as Moses and Aaron have requested. Moses is willing to concede this point and grant him this demand, but warns Pharaoh that he should not deceive him this time. He does not state what the consequences for disobedience will be, but he does present Pharaoh with this warning. The chastising does not work at all, for the next time Moses and Pharaoh speak, the very same pattern emerges:

וַיִּשְׁלַח פְּרֶעָה וַיִּקְרָא לְמֹשֶׁה וְלֵאחֶרֶן וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם חַטָּאתִי הַפַּעַם
יְדֹוֹד הַצַּדִּיק וְאֲנִי וְעַמִּי הָרָשָׁעִים: הִעֲתִירוּ אֶל־יְדֹוֹד וְרַב מִהֵיטָב
קִלְתִּי אֱלֹהִים וּבִרְדִּי וְאִשְׁלַחְהֶם אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא תִסְפֹּן לַעֲמֹד:

Thereupon, Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron and said to them, "I stand guilty this time. The LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. Plead with the LORD that there may be an end of God's thunder and

of hail I will let you go; you need stay no longer" (Exodus 9:27-28)

Pharaoh admits that he was mistaken *this time* (as if the other times he was correct in his judgement.) He again asks the brothers to plead with God to stop the hail, and then he will let them leave. By virtue of this encounter, Moses understands with whom he is dealing. Again, Moses promises the Pharaoh that he will speak to God on his behalf.

ויאמר אליו משה כצאתי את-העיר אפרש את-כפי אל-ידוד
הקלות יחדלון וחברד לא יהיה-עוד למען תדע כי לידוד
הארץ: ואתה ועבדיך ידעתי כי טרם תיראון מפני ידוד
אלהים.

Moses said to him, "As I go out of the city, I shall spread out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease and the hail will fall no more, so that you may know that the earth is the LORD's. But I know that you and your courtiers do not yet fear the LORD God." (Exodus 9:29-30)

Moses now can predict the outcome of this segment with Pharaoh, and he states it clearly at the end of his discourse; that Pharaoh does not truly fear God nor does he understand the ultimate power of God. Heskoni says that Moses says "I know that you have not yet been convinced because the barley and the flax have not yet been destroyed, and you still have enough to eat, and this is why you are still confident. I know that I will have to break you before you will agree and keep your promise."⁶² Sure enough, Pharaoh repudiates his part of the contract and Moses is forced to make serious threats on behalf of God:

ויבא משה ואהרן אל-פרעה ויאמרו אליו כה-אמר ידוד אלהי
העברים עד-מתי מאנת לענות מפני שלח עמי ויעבדני: כי אם-מאן
אתה לשלח את-עמי הנני מביא מחר ארבה בגבלך: לראת את-
הארץ ואכל את-יתר הפלטה הנשארת לכם וכסה את-עין הארץ

⁶² *Torat Chaim, Shemot I*, קא.

ולא יוכל מן-הברד ואכל את-כל-העץ הצמח לכם מן-השרה: ומלאו
בתיך ובתי כל-עבדיך ובתי כל-מצרים אשר לא-ראו אבתך ואבות
אבתך מיום היותם על-האדמה עד היום הזה ויפן ויצא מעם פרעה:

So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let my people go that they may worship Me. For if you refuse to let My people go, tomorrow I will bring locusts on your territory. They shall cover the surface of the land, so that no one will be able to see the land. They shall devour the surviving remnant that was left to you after the hail' and they shall eat away all your trees that grow in the field. Moreover, they shall fill your palaces and the houses of all your courtiers and of all the Egyptians--something that neither your fathers nor fathers' fathers have seen from the day they appeared on earth to this day.'" With that he turned and left Pharaoh's presence. (Exodus 10:3-6)

Pharaoh never speaks in this episode--one could say that he is "speechless." Moses quotes God's words for the first time, validating and authenticating his position. This is the first time that Moses gives a detailed description of the plague to befall the Egyptians. The first time that he approached Pharaoh he was quite vague, speaking about pestilence or sword. However this time Moses gives a specific list of tragedies that will befall the Egyptians if Pharaoh does not concede. Pharaoh's courtiers even speak to the king and attempt to convince him to relent:

ויאמרו עבדי פרעה אליו עד-מתי יהיה זה לנו למוקש שלח
את-האנשים ויעבדו את-ידוד אלהיהם הטרם תדע כי אברהם מצרים:

Pharaoh's courtiers said to him, "How long shall this one be a snare to us? Let the men go to worship the LORD their God! Are you not yet aware that Egypt is lost?" (Exodus 10:7)

His servants admonish him saying, "You can't win! When will you admit defeat--when we

have lost everything? Pharaoh does not respond directly to them; but he does respond indirectly, as he called Moses and Aaron back to forfeit his position

ויושב את-משה ואת-אהרן אל-פרעה ויאמר אלהם לכו עבדו
את-ידוד אל-היכם מי ומי ההלכים.

So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh and he said to them,
"Go, worship the LORD your God! Who are the ones to go?" (Exodus 10:8)

Pharaoh only makes a show of agreeing, for immediately after agreeing, he asks for more information. He still needs to feel a sense of control about the matter. Thus, he opens the floor for negotiations once again. He wants to limit the amount of people and material possessions that can go on the excursion, holding the women and children as hostages until the men return from worshipping to God. Moses replies that every single person will go on this journey, with every single animal that they own.

ויאמר משה בנערנו ובזקנינו נלך בבנינו ובבנותנו בצאננו
ובבקרנו נלך כי חג-ידוד לנו.

Moses replied, "We will all go, young and old: we will go with our sons and daughters, our flocks and herds; for we must observe the LORD's festival." (Exodus 10:9)

Moses is unwilling to haggle on this matter--his unequivocally states his objection to separating the men and women and children and livestock. Pharaoh does not accept this condition. He states that if Moses is not willing to compromise there will be no agreement:

ויאמר אלהם יהי כן ידוד עמכם כאשר אשלח אתכם ואת-טפכם
ראו כי רעה נגד פניכם: לא כן לכו-נא הגברים ועבדו את-ידוד
כי אתה אתם מבקשים ויגרש אתם מאת פני פרעה:

But he said to them, "The LORD be with you the same as I meant to let your children go with you! Clearly, you are bent on mischief. No! You menfolk go and worship the LORD, since that is what you want." And they were expelled from Pharaoh's presence (Exodus 10:10-11)

Pharaoh attempts to negotiate as if they have equal status--to negotiate on a give and take basis--while Moses does not treat him as an equal, but as his superior. He certainly shows him no respect at the bargaining table and does not give him much license to negotiate. Pharaoh seems terribly uncomfortable in this situation for he is not accustomed to being the second in command in any situation. As his servants pointed out to him, Pharaoh does not know how to concede or when to concede. God sends plagues, and Pharaoh rushed back to Moses and Aaron and pleads for forgiveness.

וימהר פרעה לקרא למשה ולאהרן ויאמר חטאתי לידוד אלהיכם ולכם: ועתה שא נא חטאתי אך הפעם והעתירו לידוד אלהיכם ויסר מעלי רק את-המות הזו:

Pharaoh hurriedly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "I stand guilty before the LORD your God and before you. Forgive my offense just this once, and plead with the LORD your God that He but remove this death from me." (Exodus 10:16-17)

Moses and Aaron make no reaction to this supplication. Their callous silence must have been especially embarrassing to Pharaoh, since he had discharged them only a short time before. The plague of darkness passes over the land and Moses is summoned back again. Pharaoh attempts to make another deal with Moses:

ויקרא פרעה אל-משה ויאמר לכו עבדו את-ידוד רק צאנכם ובקרכם יצגו גם-טפכם ילד עמכם:

Pharaoh then summoned Moses and said, "Go worship the LORD! Only your flocks and your herds shall be left behind, even your children may go with you" (Exodus 10:24).

Once again, Moses is unwilling to barter or haggle in any way with the king. Under no circumstances will he agree to this kind of compromise. In fact, he makes the negotiations even more difficult for Pharaoh, saying that not only will they indeed take their livestock with them, but Pharaoh himself will provide animals to make the needed sacrifices to God.

ויאמר משה גם-אתה תתן בידנו זבחים ועלות ועשינו לידור
אלהינו: וגם-מקננו ילך עמנו לא תשאר פרסה כי ממנו נקח לעבד
את-ידור אלהינו ואנחנו לא-נדע מה-נעבד את-ידור עד-באנו שמה:

But Moses said, "You yourself must provide us with sacrifices and burnt offerings to offer up to the LORD our God, our own livestock, too, shall go along with us--not a hoof shall remain behind: for we must select from it for the worship of the LORD our God and we shall not know with what we are to worship the LORD until we arrive there. (Exodus 10:25-26)

Pharaoh would not surrender so much authority to Moses, and refuses to accept the offer. He tells Moses to leave his presence immediately--that they are in a dead lock and they will no longer see each other face to face to continue these futile negotiations:

ויאמר-לו פרעה לך מעלי השמר לך אל-תסף ראות פני כי
ביום ראתך פני תמות:

Pharaoh said to him, "Be gone from me! Take care not to see me again, for the moment you look upon my face you shall die." (Exodus 10:28)

For the first time, Pharaoh and Moses agree about the matter. Moses speaks to Pharaoh for the last time, and says:

ויאמר משה כן דברת לא-אסף עוד ראות פניך:

And Moses replied, "You have spoken rightly. I shall not see your face again!" (Exodus 10:29)

Pharaoh closes the door on any further negotiations with Moses. By extracting the occurrence of direct discourse within this section of text, one fact becomes evident: the continuing dialogue that transpires between these two leaders is brimming with signs of power struggles. The entire story of the plagues is a contest between the will of Pharaoh and the will of God whom only the Israelites recognized. Moses has an objective demanded by God--a superior being--and may not barter or concede on points. He is an agent, fighting for a settlement for his client, with an objective that is non-negotiable. On the other hand, Pharaoh fights for his own self-interests, and eventually loses. Those around him recognize from a much earlier stage that Pharaoh will eventually fall, but he is not capable of recognizing this fact. Moses concludes his attempts to reason fairly and turns the matter over to God. Therefore, Moses may now turn his attentions to the Israelites, who have been silent observers in this massive destruction of Egyptian property.

♦ MOSES and the ESCAPE from EGYPT

Moses now gives instructions to the people, telling them exactly what will be expected of them in the near future. The tenth and final plague, which Moses alludes to in his final elocution to Pharaoh will soon occur:

ויקרא משה לכל-זקני ישראל ויאמר אלהם משכו וקחו לכם צאן
למשפחתכם ושחטו הפסח: ולקחתם אגדת אזוב וטבלתם בדם
אשר-בסף והגעתם אל-המשקוף ואל-שתי המזוזות מן-הדם אשר בסף
ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח-ביתו עד-בקר: ועבר ידוד לנגף

את-מצרים וראה את-הדם על-המשקוף ועל שתי המזוזות ופסח
 ידוד על-הפתח ולא יתן המשחית לבא אל-בתיכם לננף. ושמרתם
 את-הדבר הזה לחק-לך ולבניך עד-עולם והיה כי-תבאן אל-הארץ
 אשר יתן ידוד לכם כאשר דבר ושמרתם את-העבדה הזאת. והיה
 כי-יאמרו אליכם בניכם מה העבדה הזאת לכם. אשר פסח על-בתי
 בני-ישראל ואמרתם זבח-פסח הוא לידוד במצרים כנגפו
 את-מצרים ואת-בתינו הציל ויקד העם וישתחוו.

Moses then summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go, pick out lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover offering. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the two doorposts. None of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning. For when the LORD goes through to smite the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, and the LORD will pass over the door and not let the Destroyer enter and smite your home. You shall observe this as an institution for all time, for you and for your descendants. And when you enter the land that the LORD will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite. And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this rite?' you shall say, 'It is the passover sacrifice to the LORD, because he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but saved our houses.'" (Exodus 12:21-27)

The Israelites complete their preparations, and the stage is set for the final and climatic plague: the killing of the first born. This plague will insure the release of the Israelites once and for all. Note that Pharaoh, who has not shown a shred of honest humility until this point, must rise in the middle of the night, summon Moses and Aaron, and retract the arrogant threat that he made at their last meeting:

ויקרא למשה ולאהרן לילה ויאמר קומו צאו מתוך עמי גם-אתם
 גם-בני ישראל ולכו עבדו את-ידוד כדברכם:

He summoned Moses and Aaron in the night and said, "Up, depart from among my people, you and the Israelites with you! Go, worship the LORD as you said! (Exodus 12:31)

This is the first time that this pharaoh has called the people Israelites. By doing so, he finally recognizes their autonomy and their status as a nation. With this permission, the Israelites leave in haste before Pharaoh can change his mind again. He has proven many times over that he is not bound by his word. He is totally unpredictable and changes his mind impulsively. He has lost the respect of the Israelites as a player who can negotiate a deal and adhere to it. Therefore, Moses, Aaron, and the Israelites quickly depart Egypt, and move into the wilderness. Moses finds himself struggling against his own people, for the experience in Egypt has made them weary of authority. His negotiating skills will be quite useful, even in the desert.

◆ THE ISRAELITES COMPLAIN

While the Israelites lived in Egypt, there is no record of any kind of leadership (besides Hebrew foremen who essentially worked for the Egyptian state). The Israelites lived as an oppressed nation within a Egyptian majority. Now, for the first time, a new entity has formed: the free Israelite nation, under the directorship of Moses with his executive assistant, Aaron. Of course, God serves as the owner of the corporation, to whom all directors must answer. It is as if the Israelites have formed an enterprise where the corporate hierarchy consists of Moses and Aaron. As time passes, Moses will appoint more officers and delegate more authority. However, initially, Moses proves to be an inexperienced director, and does not seem to have the skills to run a major corporation. He governs this entity on a trial-by-error basis. The first challenge that Moses faces is an enormous one. The Israelites leave Egypt, only to be followed by Pharaoh and his army, who once again changed his mind regarding releasing

the Israelites. The people, fearing death by the sword as the menacing army approached, cried out to Moses in anger, saying

ויאמרו אל-משה המבלי אין-קברים במצרים לקחתנו למות במדבר
מה-זאת עשית לנו להוציאנו ממצרים: הלא-זה הדבר אשר דברנו
אליך במצרים לאמר חדל ממנו ונעבדה את-מצרים כי טוב לנו
עבד את-מצרים ממתנו במדבר:

And they said to Moses, "Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us be, and we will serve the Egyptians, for it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness'" (Exodus 14:11-12)

Once again we find an unverifiable piece of direct discourse. There is no record of the Israelites making such claims in the written text. Nevertheless, Moses ignores their castigation, as well as their claims. He is their leader, and must encourage them to trust him as their superior. Therefore, he pacifies them and attempts to alleviate their fears:

ויאמר משה אל-העם אל-תיראו התיצבו וראו את-ישועת ידוד
אשר-יעשה לכם היום כי אשר ראיתם את-מצרים היום לא תסיפו
לראתם עוד עד-עולם: ידוד ילחם לכם ואתם תחרישון:

But Moses said to the people, "Have no fear! Stand by, and witness the deliverance which the LORD will work for you today, for the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again. The LORD will battle for you, you hold your peace!" (Exodus 14:13-14)

They succeed to escape from the Egyptians. However, the Israelites have not finished to complain to Moses about their never-ending troubles. Food and water were in short supply. They traveled three days in the wilderness but could find no water that was suitable for drinking. Therefore, they cried out to their leader:

וילנו העם על-משה לאמר מה-נשתה:

"And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What shall we drink?'" (Exodus 15:24)
Moses does not answer the people. Rather, he calls out to God, who shows Moses how to make the bitter waters sweet. But the Israelites expressed no thanks, neither to God nor to Moses. In fact, the next time they speak, they complain once again.

ויאמרו אללהם בני ישראל מי יתן מותנו ביד-ידוד בארץ מצרים
בשבתנו על-סיר הבשר באכלנו לחם לשבע כי-הוצאתם אתנו
אל-המדבר הזה להמית את-כל-הקהל הזה ברעב.

The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we are our fill of bread! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to starve this whole congregation to death." (Exodus 16:3)

This is truly a case of unverifiable direct discourse. There is no evidence in the text that the Israelites were well-off under Egyptian rule. In fact there is a much more likely chance that they were in a much worse situation than they claim. However, sitting in the wilderness, the life in Egypt must have seemed more desirable than their present situation. Moses and Aaron respond to the people, moving the responsibility and the credit to God for bringing them out of bondage. They attempt to put the situation in proper perspective:

ויאמר משה ואהרן אל-כל-בני ישראל ערב וידעתם כי ידוד הוציא
אתכם מארץ מצרים: ידוד בשמעו את-תלנתיכם על-ידוד ונחננו
מה ובקר וראיתם את-כבוד כי תלונו +תלינו+ עלינו:

So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "By evening you shall know it was the LORD who brought you out from the land of Egypt; and in the morning you shall behold the Presence of the LORD, because He has heard your grumblings against the LORD. For who are we that you should grumble against us? Since it is the LORD," Moses continued, "who will give you flesh to eat in the evening and bread in the morning to the full, because the LORD has heard the grumblings you utter against Him, what is our part? Your grumbling is not against us, but against the LORD!" (Exodus 16:6-8)

Moses acts as the go-between between the people and God. Throughout the entire journey, the record shows that the people have done nothing but complain about the conditions of the wilderness. He begins his elocution by reminding the people that God--neither he nor Aaron--took the people out of Egypt. Rashi states that Moses makes this statement not to put the blame on another party (i.e. God), rather, the appointed leaders want to be quite sure that the Israelites understand their position: they are the intermediaries between the people and God--nothing more, nothing less.⁶³ Moses admonishes them for asking them for too much. If they had only asked for bread, it would have been acceptable. However, they asked for meat as well. This request for meat, according to Rashi, was greedy, and required a reprimand from Moses and Aaron. Nevertheless, God promises that the food that they have requested will be provided.⁶⁴ When the sustenance arrives, the people are unsure of its content and question each other:

ויראו בני-ישראל ויאמרו איש אל-אחיו מן הוא כי לא ידעו מה-הוא
ויאמר משה אלהם הוא הלחם אשר נתן ידוד לכם לאכלה: זה הדבר
אשר צוה ידוד לקטו ממנו איש לפי אכלו עמר לגלגל מספר
נפשותיכם איש לאשר באהלו תקחו:

When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it"--for they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "That is the bread which the LORD has give you to eat. This is what the LORD has commanded: Gather as much of it as each of you requires to eat, an *omer* to a person for as many of you as there are, each of you shall fetch for those in his tent. (Exodus 16:15-16)

Moses instructs them how to gather the new food-stuff and the people cease to complain for

⁶³ *Torat Chaim, Shemot I, רא.*

⁶⁴ *Torat Chaim, Shemot I, רא.*

the time being. They seem to compose themselves, adapt to their new surroundings, and start to place a small amount of trust in the leadership of Moses and Aaron. They are not convinced, and will not place their full trust in this leadership, possibly because their collective experience prevents them from giving any party total control over their situation. Some of the Israelites still refuse to listen to Moses and hearken to his word (for instance, those who collect more manna than is needed, or those who insist on collecting manna on Shabbat when Moses expressly forbid such acts). However, there are fewer incidents of disobedience (with one major exception--the episode surrounding the incident of the golden calf). Moses begins to form the new government, first providing for the basic needs of the people, then building government offices as needed.

♦ JOSHUA as MILITARY LEADER

In response to the attack by the Amalekites, Moses instructs Joshua to select men and go out and do battle with the adversary the next day:

ויאמר משה אל-יהושע בחר-לנו אנשים וצא הלחם בעמלק מחר
אנכי נצב על-ראש הגבעה ומטה האלהים בירי:

Moses said to Joshua, "Pick some men for us, and go out and do battle with Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill, with the rod of God in my hand. (Exodus 17:8)

Moses delegates to Joshua the responsibility of defending the Israelites in battle. Since fleeing from the Egyptians, this is the first incident of war, and therefore, the first time that Moses needed to appoint someone to this position. Not only does Moses assign Joshua the duty of leading the men in battle, he also gives him discretion to choose the men necessary for this

battle. This is the first time that another person has been delegated any authority or power since leaving Egypt. The reader knows that Joshua will eventually succeed Moses in the leadership--he will be the one to take the Israelites into the land of Canaan, leading wars of conquest as commander-in-chief against the Canaanites. At this time, he must prove his leadership abilities--and that is what Moses allows him to do.

♦ JETHRO and MOSES

Moses' father-in-law sends word to Moses that he is coming to visit with Moses' wife and two children. Moses goes out and greets Jethro, paying him great respect and honor. He brings his father-in-law into his tent and describes all that has happened to the Israelite people since his return to Egypt. Jethro is so impressed with the story, he makes a burnt offering and offers sacrifices to God:

וַיֹּאמֶר יִתְרוֹ בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הֹצִיל אֶתְכֶם מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וּמִיַּד פַּרְעֹה
אֲשֶׁר הֹצִיל אֶת-הָעָם מִתַּחַת יַד-מִצְרַיִם: עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי-גָדוֹל יְהוָה
מִכָּל-הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי בִדְבַר אֲשֶׁר זָדוּ עֲלֵיהֶם:

"Blessed be the LORD," Jethro said, "who delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, yes, by the result of their very schemes against [the people]." (Exodus 18:10-11)

The next day, Jethro watches Moses acting in the position of sole judge and jury while the people stand around from morning until evening awaiting their opportunity for arbitration. Jethro is shocked at the inefficiency of the system of justice, especially because of the hardships that it places on Moses and on the people.

וירא חתן משה את כל-אשר-הוא עשה לעם ויאמר מה-הדבר הזה
אשר אתה עשה לעם מדוע אתה יושב לבדך וכל-העם נצב עליך
מן-בקר עד-ערב.

But when Moses' father-in-law saw how much he had to do for the people,
he said, "What is this thing that you are doing to the people? Why do you act
alone, while all the people stand about you from morning until evening?"
(Exodus 18:14)

Moses replies to his father-in-law that there is simply too much work to be done:

ויאמר משה לחתנו כי-יבא אלי העם לדרש אלהים: כי-יהיה להם
דבר בא אלי ושפטתי בין איש ובין רעהו וחודעתי את-חקי
האלהים ואת-תורתיו.

Moses replied to his father-in-law, "It is because the people come to me to
inquire of God. When they have a dispute, it comes before me, and I decide
between one person and another, and I make known the laws and teachings
of God." (Exodus 18:15-16)

Jethro explains to Moses that there are other systems that could be used to alleviate the
amount of work required by Moses himself:

ויאמר חתן משה אליו לא-טוב הדבר אשר אתה עשה: נבל תבל
גם-אתה גם-העם הזה אשר עמך כי-כבד ממך הדבר לא-תוכל
עשהו לבדך: עתה שמע בקלי איעצך ויהי אלהים עמך היה אתה
לעם מול האלהים וחבאת אתה את-הדברים אל-האלהים:
והזהרתה אתהם את-החקים ואת-התורה וחודעת להם את-הדרך
ילכו בה ואת-המעשה אשר יעשון: ואתה תחזה מכל-העם אנשי-
שרי מאות שרי חמשים ושרי עשרת: ושפטו את-העם בכל-עת והיה
כל-הדבר הגדל יביאו אליך וכל-הדבר הקטן ישפטו-הם והקל
מעליך ונשאו אתך: אם את-הדבר הזה תעשה וצוך אלהים ויכלת
עמר וגם כל-העם הזה על-מקמו יבא בשלום.

But Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing you are doing is not right. you will surely wear yourself out and these people as well. For the task is too heavy for you, you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You represent the people before God; you bring the disputes before God, and enjoin upon them the laws and the teachings, and make known to them the way they are to go and the practices they are to follow. You shall also seek out from among all the people capable men who fear God, trustworthy men who spurn ill-gotten gain. Set these over them as chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, and let them judge the people at all times. Have them bring every major dispute to you, but let them decide every minor dispute themselves. Make it easier for yourself by letting them share the burden with you. If you do this--and God so commands you--you will be able to bear up, and all these people too will go home unwearied (Exodus 18:17-23)

He advises Moses to create a hierarchy where minor officers have the discretionary power to make lesser decisions, and only the most complicated issues will receive Moses' attention. This would create a bottle-neck system of justice that would prove to be much more efficient and more effective than before. Furthermore, Jethro urges Moses to train the secondary judges himself, to assure the people that the judgements made would be the fairest possible decisions--as if they came from Moses himself. He also stipulates the type of people that should be selected for such positions--those that are God-fearing and trustworthy. Moses takes his father-in-law's advice and establishes this system.

◆ PREPARING TO RECEIVE THE COMMANDMENTS

Moses summons all of the elders and all of **העם** (the people) of Israel and told them all that God had told him--and asked them if they were willing to accept the commandments. The people responded in a single voice:

ויענו כל-העם יחדו ויאמרו כל אשר-דבר ידוד נעשה וישב
משה את-דברי העם אל-ידוד:

All the people answered as one, saying, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do!" (Exodus 19:8)

They agreed to the contract without speaking to the contractor, but his agent Moses appeared to have a fair knowledge of the terms of agreement. It is questionable--however--if the women are spoken to or answer Moses in this chorus; for the next time that he speaks to the people--again **העם**--he said the following:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-הָעָם הָיוּ נָכְנִים לְשִׁלֹּשֶׁת יָמִים אֶל-הַנָּשִׁי אֶל-אִשְׁתָּה:

And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day: Do not go near a woman." (Exodus 19:15)

Therefore, it is questionable if the initial address was directed to all of the people, or only to the men.

♦ RECEIVING THE COMMANDMENTS

After seeing Mount Sinai in smoke, and hearing the thunder roar in answer to Moses, the people grow frightened. They plead with Moses that they would listen and harken to every word, if only he would not allow God to speak to them:

**וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר-אַתָּה עִמָּנוּ וְנִשְׁמָעָה וְאַל-יְדַבֵּר עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים
פֶּן-נָמוּת:**

"You speak to us," they said to Moses, "and we will obey; but let not God speak to us, lest we die." (Exodus 20:16)

Moses answers the people:

**וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-הָעָם אַל-תִּירְאוּ כִּי לְבַעֲבוֹר נָסוּת אֶתְכֶם בָּא
הָאֱלֹהִים וּבַעֲבוֹר תִּהְיֶה יְרֵאתוֹ עַל-פְּנֵיכֶם לְבִלְתִּי תַחֲטְאוּ:**

Moses answered the people, "Be not afraid, for God has come only in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may be ever with you, so that you do not go astray" (Exodus 20:17)

Moses explains to the Israelites that they should not be afraid of any present harm. He elaborates that the purpose behind God's appearance is to bring awareness to the Israelites that God is omnipotent. God gives the people of Israel a benefit, allowing them to become full members of this corporation which Moses initiated. God promises that this corporation will be prosperous and successful, but only if the people obey the rules that have been established, and listen to the leadership that has been appointed.

♦ THE GOLDEN CALF

Moses ascended the mountain alone for an extended period of time. During this interval he received a lengthy description of the laws that the Israelites would follow in the future. In the meanwhile, the Israelites were concerned when Moses did not return as quickly as they expected:

וירא העם כי-בשש משה לרדת מן-החר ויקהל העם על-אהרן
ויאמרו אליו קום עשה-לנו אלהים אשר ילכו לפנינו כי-זה
משה האיש אשר העלנו מארץ מצרים לא ידענו מה-היה לו:

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt--we do not know what has happened to him." (Exodus 32:1)

Ramban says that they did not intend to build a god--they knew what God was and God's strength. They wanted to replace not God--but Moses. It is evident from **ילכו לפנינו**

אלהים אשר (a god who shall walk before us) that they wanted some form of being leading the Israelites and mediating between them and God, as Moses did until this point in time.⁶⁵ In the business sense, they are attempting to replace the director, for they feared that he had deserted the organization. Aaron attempts to diffuse the fear by allowing the Israelites to do as they wish.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִין פֶּרֶקוּ נִזְמֵי הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵי נְשֵׁיכֶם בְּנִיכֶם וּבְנֹתֵיכֶם וְהָבִיאוּ אֵלַי.

Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." (Exodus 32:2)

The commentators go to great lengths to show Aaron in a positive light.⁶⁶ He does not wish to build the idol, but he feels as if he has little choice in the matter. At the same time that he does not wish to betray his brother, he believes that the people will ultimately kill him and create an anarchy from which they will never recover. Heskoni says that Aaron tries to keep them occupied—to give them tasks until Moses returns. Rashi states that he tells them to get their wives' jewelry, because he suspects that they will be reluctant to relinquish it to their husbands. Aaron has a choice: to maintain some control and leadership, or to surrender to the masses. According to most of the commentators, he chooses the lesser of two evils, thereby saving the Israelites from destroying themselves.⁶⁷ Joshua confirms God's report that there is great strife in the camp.

⁶⁵ *Torat Chaim, Shemot* 11, קפ"ד.

⁶⁶ *Torat Chaim, Shemot* 11, קפ"ז.

⁶⁷ *Torat Chaim, Shemot* 11, קפ"ז.

When Joshua heard the sound of the people in its boisterousness, he said to Moses, "There is a cry of war in the camp."

Moses returns to the camp, seeks out Aaron, and, without delay accuses Aaron for the disorder that was prevalent

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-אַהֲרֹן מַה-עָשָׂה לָךְ הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּי-חָבֵאתָ עֲלֵיהֶם חַטָּאת גְּדוֹלָה׃

Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought such great sin upon them?" (Exodus 32:21)

Aaron tries to find reason to explain his actions. His speech causes great concern among the commentators as well as to the general audience, for he directly contradicts his own speech in earlier verses:

וַיֹּאמֶר אַהֲרֹן אֶל-יָחִיד אֶף אֲדַנִּי אֶתְּךָ יָדַעְתָּ אֶת-הָעָם כִּי בָרַע הוּא׃ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לִי עֲשֵׂה-לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יִלְכּוּ לִפְנֵינוּ כִּי-זֶה מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מֶה-הָיָה לוֹ׃ וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לְמִי זֶהב הִתְפַּרְקוּ וְיִתְּנוּ-לִי וְאֶשְׁלַכְהוּ בָאֵשׁ וַיֵּצֵא הָעֵגֶל הַזֶּה׃

Aaron said, "Let not my lord be enraged. You know that this people is bent on evil. They said to me, 'Make us a god to lead us, for that man Moses, who from us from the land of Egypt--we do not know what has happened to him. So I said to them, 'Whoever has gold, take it off!' They gave it to me and I hurled it into the fire and out came this calf!" (Exodus 32:22-24)

Aaron's speech does not placate Moses whatsoever--he does not respond to his brother, he turns around, and begins to rectify the situation. It could be said that nowhere else does a speaker use quoted direct speech quite so vainly. Aaron's disapproves of the actions of the people. When he states that **אתה ידעת את-העם כי ברע הוא** (You know that this people is bent on evil) negates any chance that the quotation might have given to his account.

The first quotation is a near-perfect version of the people's words in 32:1. But when he replicates his own words in verse 24 he is much less precise, lacking the specificity found in his first quotation and omitting his command that the people should bring their gold to him. The reader, of course, expects the opposite--the orator should be able to reconstruct his own words and deeds with greater honesty than those of another person. Thus when Aaron makes no remark about his role in making the molten-image, nor of his declaration that the following day would be a feast to God, the accuracy with which he quoted the people in verse 23 becomes even more damaging evidence against himself.⁶⁸ Moses then calls into the camp, saying:

ויעמד משה בשער המחנה ויאמר מי לידוד אלי ויאספו אליו
 כל-בני לוי ויאמר לחם כה-אמר ידוד אלהי ישראל שימו
 איש-חרבו על-ירכו ועברו ושובו משער לשער במחנה וחרגו
 איש-את-אחיו ואיש את-רעהו ואיש את-קרבו:

Moses stood up in the gate of the camp and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come here! And all the Levites rallied to him. He said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Each of you put sword on thigh, go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay brother, neighbor, and kin." (Exodus 32:26-27)

Moses calls upon an emergency army to rectify--as much as possible--the appalling actions of the Israelites. Although the text demonstrates a process of delegating authority to others (i.e., Joshua, the magistrates, etc...) this situation requires Moses to take direct control. Moses, as director of the company, has been on an extended sabbatical. When he returns to find the structure in disarray, he quickly takes hold of the reigns and pulls everyone back to their positions. In the process, key players probably were replaced, and certain employees

⁶⁸ Savran 82-83.

were fired, but all-in-all, the corporation survives. The next day, Moses calls an meeting of the entire population to attempt to rectify the situation

ויהי ממחרת ויאמר משה אל-העם אתם חטאתם חטאה גדלה ועתה
אעלה אל-ידוד אילי אכפרה בעד חטאתכם.

The next day Moses said to the people, "You have been guilty of a great sin. Yet I will now go up to the LORD; perhaps I may win forgiveness for your sin." (Exodus 32:30)

Moses pleads on the people's behalf. God listens to Moses' request, and forgives those individuals who were not involved in the incident, and the story of the exodus continues. The corporation survives an attempted takeover, and emerges with a partially new structure, rooting out the trouble-makers within the structure.

♦ BEZALEL

This speech made by Moses designates Bezalel as the chief artisans to complete the building of God's Tabernacle. Moses presents the people with a strong argument as to why Bezalel should be appointed:

ויאמר משה אל-בני ישראל ראו קרא ידוד בשם בצלאל בן-אורי
בן-חור למטה יהודה: וימלא אתו רוח אלהים בחכמה בתבונה
ובדעת ובכל-מלאכה: ולחשב מחשבת לעשת בזהב ובכסף
ובנחשת: ובחרשת אבן למלאה ובחרשת עץ לעשות בכל-מלאכה
מחשבת: ולהורת נתן בלבו הוא ואהליאב בן-אחיסמך למטה-דן:
מלא אתם חכמת-לב לעשות כל-מלאכה חרש וחשב ורקם בתכלית
ובארגמן בתולעת השני ובשש וארג עשי כל-מלאכה וחשבי
מחשבת: ועשה בצלאל ואהליאב וכל איש חכם-לב אשר נתן ידוד
חכמה ותבונה בחמה לדעת לעשת את-כל-מלאכת עבדת הקדש
לכל אשר-צוה ידוד:

And Moses said to the Israelites: See, the LORD has singled out by name Bezalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. He has endowed him

with a divine spirit, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft and has inspired him to make designs for work in gold, silver, and copper, to cut stones for setting and to carve wood--to work in every kind of designer's craft--and to give directions. He an Oholiab son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan have been endowed with the skill to do any work--of the carver, the designer, the embroiderer in blue, purple, crimson yarns, and in fine linen, and of the weaver--as workers in all crafts and as makers of designs. Let, then, Bezalel and Oholiab and all the skilled persons whom the LORD has endowed with skill and ability to perform expertly all the tasks connected with the service of the sanctuary and carry out all that the LORD has commanded" (Exodus 35:30-31:1)

Moses had the option of appointing them without explanation, yet he chose to utilize this opportunity to appoint Bezalel, Oholiab, and "all the skilled persons who the LORD has endowed with skill..." He brings the people into the process rather than making it an executive decision, so that in the future there will be no questions asked about why *that* artist was chosen.

The Book of Numbers

◆ THE ISRAELITES COMPLAIN: REPRISE

Once again, the Israelites fall back into their old patten of complaining and becoming enraged at their faithful leadership:

ותשא כל-העדה ויתנו את-קולם ויבכו העם בלילה ההוא: וילנו
על-משה ועל-אהרן כל בני ישראל ויאמרו אלם כל-העדה
לו-מתנו בארץ מצרים או במדבר הזה לו-מתנו:

All the Israelites rallied against Moses and Aaron. "If only we had died in the land of Egypt," the whole community shouted at them, "or if only we might die in this wilderness! Why is the LORD taking us to that land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our children will be carried off? It would be better for us to go back to Egypt!" And they said to one another, "Let us head back for Egypt." (Numbers 14:1-4)

It is the duty of the directors to keep productivity up (meaning maintaining the lives of the Israelites), and also to keep the members looking forward toward a promising future instead of backward at a company that never existed. There must be an expectation of growth. Hearing the reports of the spies, the Israelites lose hope of any possibility of having a prosperous life in the land of Canaan. Therefore, Moses and the other leadership are faced with the task of reassuring the people that all is not lost, and that life will be prosperous.

◆ THE SPIES

After the spies brought back their negative reports about the land of Canaan, God became incensed. God declared that no one from this generation who had disobeyed the laws set before them in the wilderness would be allowed to enter the land. In grief, the Israelites foolishly came to Moses, and informed him that *now* they would be more than happy to enter the land:

וישכמו בבקר ויעלו אל-ראש-ההר לאמר הננו ועלינו אל-המקום
אשר-אמר ידוד כי חטאנו:

Early the next morning they set out toward the crest of the hill country, saying, "We are prepared to go up to the place that the LORD has spoken of, for we were wrong." (Numbers 14:40)

But Moses knows that it is too late: their past actions could not be rectified. There was no opportunity for repentance and forgiveness from God, and Moses answered them accordingly:

ויאמר משה למה זה אתם עברים את-פי ידוד והוא לא תצליח:
אל-תעלו כי אין ידוד בקרבכם ולא תנגפו לפני איביכם: כי
העמלקי והכנעני שם לפניכם ונפלתם בחרב כי-על-כן שבתם
מאחרי ידוד ולא-יהיה ידוד עמכם:

But Moses said, "Why do you transgress the LORD's command? This will not succeed. Do not go up, lest you be routed by your enemies, for the LORD is not in your midst. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will be there to face you, and you will fall by the sword, inasmuch as you have turned from following the LORD and the LORD will not be with you" (Numbers 14:41-43)

Nevertheless, they attempt to enter the land and are killed. Moses, as a director, explains that without the proper backing, any attempt to enter the land would be futile, because they would be complete annihilated. They choose to take the chance, and lose their lives in the process. Moses cannot be found negligent in the matter, for he did warn them what the outcome would be. The owner would never rescind the executive decision.

♦ KORACH

This story shows the hazards of causing a major uprising against the leaders of the community. Korach raised a cry from the masses stating that all God's people are holy--why did Moses and Aaron hold themselves above the rest of the community?

ויקהלו על-משה ועל-אהרן ויאמרו אלהם רב-לכם כי כל-העדה
כלם קדשים ובתוכם ידוד ומדוע תחנשאו על-קהל ידוד:

They combined against Moses and Aaron and said to them "You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and the LORD is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the LORD's congregation?" (Numbers 16:3)

This is an attempt to make a hostile takeover by a faction of very powerful members of the group who gather in the middle of the day, in public, in order to gain support. Moses responds by leaving the ultimate decision to God:

וידבר אל-קרח ואל-כל-עדתו לאמר בקר וידע ידוד את-אשר-לו

ואת-הקדוש והקריב אליו ואת אשר יבחר בו יקריב אליו: זאת עשו
 קחו-לכם מחתות קרח וכל-עדתו: ותנו בהן אש ושימו עליהן קטרת
 לפני ידוד מחר והיה האיש אשר-יבחר ידוד הוא הקדוש רב-לכם
 בני-לוי: ויאמר משה אל-קרח שמעו-נא בני-לוי: המעט מכם כי-
 הבר'ל אלהי ישראל אתכם מעדת ישראל להקריב אתכם אליו
 לעבד את-עבדת משכן ידוד ולעמד לפני העדה לשרתם. ויקרב
 אתך ואת-כל-אחריך בני-לוי אתך ובקשתם גם-כהנה: לכן אתה וכל-
 עדתך הנעדרים על-ידוד ואהרן מה-הוא כי תלונו ותלינו-עליו

Then he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, "Come morning, the LORD will make known who is His and who is holy, and will grant him access to Himself. He will grant access to the one He has chosen. Do this. You, Korah and all your band, take fire pans, and tomorrow put fire in them and lay incense on them before the LORD. Then the man whom the LORD chooses, he shall be the holy one. You have gone too far, sons of Levi!" Moses said further to Korah, "Hear me, sons of Levi. Is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has set you apart from the community of Israel and given you access to Him, to perform the duties of the LORD's Tabernacle and to minister to the community and serve them? Now that He has advanced you and all your fellow Levites with you, do you seek the priesthood too? Truly it is against the LORD that you and all your company have banded together. For who is Aaron that you should rail against him? (Numbers 16:5-11)

Moses is so confident that God will support him that he does not defend himself. He admonishes them, saying that as Levites they already have special duties that set them apart from the rest of the people. Moses understands that this is a power play--reminiscence of the failed negotiations between Moses and Pharaoh back in Egypt. He attempts to rectify the situation before it escalates and calls for Dothan and Abiram, two of the men whom supported Korach, but they refused to speak to Moses.

וישלח משה לקרא לדתן ולאבירם בני אליאב ויאמרו לא נעלה:
 המעט כי העליחנו מארץ זבת חלב ודבש להמיתנו במדבר כי-
 תשתרר עלינו גם-השתרר: אף לא אל-ארץ זבת חלב ודבש הביאתנו
 ותתן-לנו נחלת שדה וכרם העיני האנשים ההם תנקר לא נעלה:

Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, but they said, "we will not come! Is it not enough that you brought us from a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, that you would also lord it over us? Even if you had brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, and given us possession of fields and vineyards, should you gouge out those men's eyes? We will not come!" (Numbers 16:12-14)

Moses, furious with Korach and his supporters, devises a plan by which God will decide on the future of the leadership

ויאמר משה אל-קרח אתה וכל-עדתך היו לפני ידוד אתה נחם
ואהרן מחר: וקחו איש מחתתו ונתתם עליהם קטרת והקרבתם
לפני ידוד איש מחתתו חמשים ומאתים מחתת ואתה ואהרן
איש מחתתו.

And Moses said to Korah, "Tomorrow, you and all your company appear before the LORD, you and they and Aaron. Each of you take his fire pan and lay incense on it, and each of you bring his fire pan before the LORD, two hundred and fifty fire pans; you and Aaron also [bring] your fire pans."
(Numbers 16:16-17)

ויאמר משה בזאת תדעון כי-ידוד שלחני לעשות את כל-המעשים
האלה כי-לא מלבי-אם-כמות כל-האדם ימתון אלה ופקדת כל-
האדם יפקד עליהם לא ידוד שלחני: ואם-בריאה יברא ידוד
ופצתה האדמה את-פיה ובלעה אתם ואת-כל-אשר להם וירדו
חיים שאלה וידעתם כי נאצו האנשים האלה את-ידוד:

And Moses said, "By this you shall know that it was the LORD that sent me to do all these things, and they are not of my own devising: if these men die as all men do, if their lot be the common fate of all mankind, it was not the LORD who sent me. But if the LORD brings about something unheard-of, so that the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, you shall know that these men have spurned the LORD." (Numbers 16:28-30)

Moses decides to make a public demonstration of his authority and his right to choose the leaders of the people. Therefore, he isolates the faction that opposes him and announces that it was not his will that made those decisions that upset that faction so, but rather God. To

prove this, those opposing him--that he singled out--will die by the hand of God, in an unnatural way that could only be attributed to God. Immediately after he speaks, the earth opens and swallows them with their possessions. It is no surprise that God supports Moses to continue his role as director of the company. God spent several years training Moses for his special duties, and they developed a fairly unique relationship compared to the rest of the people.

♦ BALAM AND BALAK

This anecdote pertaining to blessings and curses is the final episode of direct discourse in the Pentateuch. Balak, king of Moab at that time requested that Balaam come to him in order to place a curse on his enemy, the Israelites:

וַיֹּאמֶר מוֹאָב אֶל-זִקְנֵי מִדְיָן עֲתָה יִלְחָכוּ הַקָּהָל אֶת-כָּל-סְבִיבֹתֵינוּ
כָּל־חֵךְ הַשּׂוֹר אֶת יֶרֶק הַשָּׂדֶה וּבֹלֵק בֶּן-צִפּוֹר מֶלֶךְ לְמוֹאָב בֵּעַת הַחֹוּא:
וַיִּשְׁלַח מַלְאָכָיו אֶל-בִּלְעָם בֶּן-בְּעוֹר פֶּתוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר עַל-הַנָּהָר אֲרִי
בְנֵי-עַמּוֹ לִקְרֹא לוֹ לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה עִם יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם הִנֵּה כָסָה אֶת-עֵין
הָאָרֶץ וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב מִמֶּלִּי וְעַתָּה לִכְהֹנָה אֲרֹה-לִי אֶת-הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּי
עֲצוּם הוּא מִמֶּנִּי אוֹלִי אוֹכֵל נֶכֶח-בּוֹ וְאֶגְרֹשׁוֹ מִן-הָאָרֶץ כִּי יִדְעֹתִי
אֶת אֲשֶׁר-תִּבְרַךְ וְאֲשֶׁר תֹּאֲרִי יוֹאֲרִי:

And Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this horde will lick clean all that is about us as an ox licks up the grass of the field." Balak son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time sent messengers to Balaam son of Beor in Pethor, which is by the Euphrates, in the land of his kinfolk, to invite him, saying, "There is a people that came out of Egypt; it hides the earth from view, and it is settled next to me. Come then, put a curse upon this people for me, since they are too numerous for me; perhaps I can thus defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed indeed, and he whom you curse is cursed. (Numbers 22:4-6)

Balak does not offer Balaam financial compensation for his services yet; this aspect will be

discussed in a later passage. The messengers go to Balaam, who invites them to stay at his house. He did not give them an answer immediately, but informs them that he would do as God would instruct.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם לֵינוּ פֹה הַלַּיְלָה וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי אִתְּכֶם דָּבָר כֹּאשֶׁר יִדְבֹר יְדוֹד אֱלֹהֵי וְיִשְׁבּוּ שָׂרֵי-מֹאָב עִם-בָּלַעַם.

He said to them, "Spend the night here, and I shall reply to you as the LORD may instruct me. So the Moabite dignitaries stayed with Balaam (Numbers 22:8).

God forbids Balaam to go with them, because the people that are in question are blessed by

God. Balaam discloses to the men that God will not allow him to go with the men

וַיִּקָּם בָּלַעַם בִּבְקֹר וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-שָׂרֵי בָלָק לֵכוּ אֶל-אַרְצְכֶם כִּי מֵאֵן יָדוֹד לַתִּי לַחֲלֹץ עִמָּכֶם.

Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak's dignitaries, "Go back to your own country, for the LORD will not let me go with you." (Numbers 22:13)

Balak is not satisfied with this reply and sends another set of messengers. This time, the messengers offer Balaam a financial reward for his services, but he still refuses, saying that he could not contradict God:

וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-בָּלַעַם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ כֹּה אָמַר בָּלָק בֶּן-צִפּוֹר אֶל-נָא תִמְנַע מִחֲלֹץ אֵלַי כִּי-כָבֹד אֶכְבֹּדְךָ מְאֹד וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-תֹּאמַר אֱלֹהֵי אֵעֲשֶׂה וְלֹכֶה-נָא קִבֵּה-לִי אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה.

They came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus says Balak son of Zippor: Please do not refuse to come to me. I will reward you richly and I will do anything you ask of me. Only come and damn this people for me." (Numbers 22:16-17)

וַיַּעַן בָּלַעַם וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-עֲבָדֵי בָלָק אִם-יֵתֵן-לִי בָלָק מֵלֶא בֵּיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא אוּכַל לַעֲבֹר אֶת-פִּי יְדוֹד אֱלֹהֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת קְטָנָה אוֹ גְדוֹלָה:

ועתה שבו נא בזה נב-אתם הלילה ואדעה מה יספך ידוד דבר עמי:

Balaam replied to Balak's officials, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, big or contrary to the command of the LORD my God. So you, too, stay here overnight, and let me find out what else the LORD may say to me." (Numbers 22:18-19)

Apparently, God appears to him and allows him to go with the men, as long as he does exactly what God instructs. Balaam does indeed decide to go with the messengers. However, God seems to have a change of heart, and sends a messenger to Balaam in the form of an angel to remind Balaam that he is to serve God, and not a king who has offered this short term contract. Balaam approaches Balak, and says to him:

ויאמר בלק אל-בלעם הלא שלח שליחתי אליך לקרא-לך
למה לא-הלכת אלי האמנם לא אוכל כבודך:

Balak said to Balaam, "When I first sent to invite you, why didn't you come to me? Am I really unable to reward you?" (Numbers 22:37)

There is no mention of the fact that money was never offered by the first messengers. Perhaps it was simply assumed that Balaam would be compensated. Balaam answers Balak, saying that God had prevented him from coming, and even now he was restricted in terms of what he would be able to accomplish:

ויאמר בלעם אל-בלק הנה-באתי אליך עתה היכול אוכל דבר
מאומה הדבר אשר ישים אלהים בפני אתו אדבר:

But Balaam said to Balak, "And now that I have come to you, have I the power to speak freely? I can utter only the word that God puts into my mouth." (Numbers 22:38)

Nevertheless, Balaam prepares to do as Balak has requested. Balaam tells Balak that he needs certain materials in order to complete his task:

ויאמר בלעם אל-בלק בנה-לי בזה שבעה מזבחת והכן לי בזה
שבעה פרים ושבעה אילים

Balaam said to Balak, "Build me seven altars here and have seven bulls and seven rams ready here for me" (Numbers 23:1)

Balak does as requested, and then Balaam tells him that he will return momentarily

ויאמר בלעם לבלק התיצב על-עלתך ואלכה אילי יקרה ידוד
לקראתי ודבר מה-יראני והגדתי לך וילך שפי

Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stay here beside your offerings while I am gone. Perhaps the LORD will grant me a manifestation, and whatever He reveals to me I will tell you" And he went off alone (Numbers 23:3)

God again instructs Balaam not to curse the Israelite people as requested by Balak. He returns to his employer, but as God has said, he does not curse the people--instead, he blesses them.

Balak is incensed by this turn of events:

ויאמר בלק אל-בלעם מה עשית לי לקב איבי לקחתך והנה
ברכת בהך ויען ויאמר הלא את אשר ישם ידוד בפי אתו אשמר לדבר:

Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? Here I brought you to damn my enemies, and instead you have blessed them!" He replied, "I can only repeat faithfully what the LORD puts in my mouth" (Numbers 23:11-12)
Balak, unwilling to admit defeat, instructs Balaam to follow him to another location, and attempt to curse the people from there:

ויאמר אליו בלק לך-+לכה-+נא אתי אל-מקום אחר אשר
תראנו משם אפס קצחו תראה וכלו לא תראה וקבנו-לי משם

Then Balak said to him, "Come with me to another place from which you can see them--you will see only a portion of them; you will not see all of them--and damn them for me from there." (Numbers 23:13)

Perhaps the king thought that God would not find Balaam in order to instruct him in the matter, or become confused due to the change in location, or simply to change their luck.

Balaam follows the king's order, asking Balak to make the same preparations that were made for the first attempt. Balak complies. Then, Balaam then takes leave of the king in order to ask God what he should do.

ויאמר אל-בלק התיצב כה על-עלתך ואנכי אקרה כה.

And [Balaam] said to Balak, "Stay here beside your offerings, while I seek a manifestation yonder" (Numbers 23:15)

Once again, God speak to Balaam and instructs him to bless the people. Balaam does exactly as God requests, and once again, Balak is incensed.

ויאמר בלק אל-בלעם גם-קב לא תקבנו גם-ברך לא תברכנו: ויען בלעם ויאמר אל-בלק הלא דברתי אליך לאמר כל אשר-ידבר ידור אתו אעשה:

Thereupon Balak said to Balaam, "Don't curse them and don't bless them!" In reply, Balaam said to Balak, "But I told you: Whatever the LORD says, that I must do." Then Balak said to Balaam, "Come now, I will take you to another place. Perhaps God will deem it right that you damn them for me from there." (Numbers 23:25-27)

For the third time, Balak builds the alters and gathers the animals.

ויאמר בלעם אל-בלק בנה-לי בזה שבעה מזבחת והכן לי בזה שבעה פרים ושבעה אילים.

Balaam said to Balak, "Build me here seven alters, and have seven bulls and seven rams ready for me here." (Numbers 23:29)

Again, for the third time, Balaam blesses the people, and his boss is furious.

פעמים ויאמר בלק אל-בלעם לקב איבי קראתיך והנה ברכת ויחר-אף בלק אל-בלעם ויספק את-כפיו ברך זה שלש: ועוזה ברח-לך אל-מקומך אמרתי כבוד אכבדך והנה מנעך ידור מכבוד:

Enraged at Balaam, Balak struck his hands together. "I called you," Balak said to Balaam, "to damn my enemies, and instead you have blessed them these

three times! Back with you at once to your own place! I was going to reward you richly, but the LORD has denied you the reward" (Numbers 24:10-11)

Balak reminds Balaam that *he* is the employer--that Balaam would have taken away a enormous bonus if he had accomplished his task. Since he had not fulfilled his part of the contract, Balak was under no obligation to compensate Balaam. Balaam seems to understand that this is the case. The only reason that he journeys to Moab is because God instructed him to do so.

ויאמר בלעם אל בלק הלא גם אל-מלאכך אשר-שלחת אלי
דברתי לאמר: אם-יתן-לי בלק מלא ביתו כסף וזהב לא אוכל
לעבר את-פי ידוד לעשות טובה או רעה מלבי אשר-ידבר
ידוד אתו אדבר: ועתה הנני דולך לעמי לכה איעצך אשר
יעשה העם הזה לעמך באחרית הימים.

Balaam replied to Balak, "But I even told the messengers you sent to me, 'Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not of my own accord do anything good or bad contrary to the LORD's command. When the LORD says, that I must say. And now, as I go back to my people, let me inform you of what this people will do to your people in days to come.'" (Exodus 24:12-14)

Balaam does not contest the contract. He completes his oration and takes leave of the king. He has not benefited financial in any way, nor did he expect this benefit. However, Balak anticipated to recompensate him for his work--thus making it a business arrangement.

Conclusion

More often than not, direct discourse between men revolves around business related issues, as discussed at length in this chapter. Business may be defined in a variety of ways, but in its purest form it is one party striving to gain an advantage over another. Many times this advantage is economic, although not necessarily in all cases. Direct discourse is utilized to highlight how each party attempts to gain its advantage through negotiations. One example would be Jacob's negotiation with Esau over the inheritance rights, which resulted in Jacob acquiring--though through duress and deceit--his brother's rightful inheritance. Another example is the negotiations that transpire between Moses and Pharaoh, where direct discourse is utilized in every stage of the negotiation to show Pharaoh's attempt to alter the agreement and Moses' reluctance to do so. It is through direct discourse that Joseph manipulates Pharaoh into choosing him for the task of saving the entire country--and his family as well. There are of course instances when direct discourse is used to illustrate emotions of characters, yet the majority of the times, it gives us an insight into the complicated dealings between parties.

Chapter Five: Woman to Woman--Sister to Sister

The amount of woman to woman speech in the Pentateuch is exceptionally lacking. Compared to incidences of men to men speaking, where there are a multitude of stories to examine, there are only three such stories in this category of speech, a total of nine acts of speech in all. The common themes that thread all three episodes together are the issues of reproduction and child care. Commentators have little--if anything--to say about these incidences of speech.

◆ THE DAUGHTERS OF LOT

After witnessing the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, the death of their extended family and their mother, the daughters of Lot were in a desperate situation. They plot to give their father drink so that he would lie with each one of them and impregnate them with his seed.

וְהָאִמֶּר הַבְּכִירָה אֶל-הַצְעִירָה אֲבִינוּ זָקֵן וְאִישׁ אֵין בָּאָרֶץ לְבוֹא
עֲלֵינוּ כְּדֶרֶךְ כָּל-הָאָרֶץ: לִכְחַ נְשָׂקָה אֶת-אֲבִינוּ יַיִן וְנִשְׁכְּבָה עִמּוֹ
וְנַחֲיָה מֵאֲבִינוּ זֶרַע:

And the older one said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to consort with us in the way of all the world. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him, that we may maintain life through our father." (Genesis 19:31-32)

Radak states that they thought they were the last people on the face of the earth, having no knowledge of other settlements besides the one in which they resided. Therefore, he says,

their true intention in this matter was in fact to reproduce.¹ It is unlikely that there are lustful intentions here, even though to the modern ear it is difficult to read about daughters seducing their father. Ramban suggests that they hoped that one would have a daughter while the other would produce a son, so that they could mate and reproduce.² It is likely that they anticipated raising their children in solitude, nevertheless, that their deceitful act would bring life anew to the world.

◆ RACHEL, LEAH and the MANDRAKES

While her sister Leah proved to be a fruitful wife for Jacob, Rachel did not produce as a biblical wife should--she was childless for the first several years of their marriage. There is no record in the text of Leah and Rachel speaking in the text until this point--neither before their marriage to Jacob, nor after. The audience never hears the sisters' reaction to fooling Jacob into marrying the elder sister. The listeners are not privy to the conversations that might have occurred during the moments immediately preceding the wedding. The only recorded information that exists regarding the relationship between the two sisters occurs in this passage. Rachel, attempting become pregnant with a (male) child, asks Leah to give her a certain fruit that Reuben brings to her:

וַיֵּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן בַּיּוֹם קִצְיֹר-חֲטִיטִים וַיִּמְצָא דוּדָאִים בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיָּבֵא אֹתָם
אֶל-לֵאָה אִמּוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר רַחֵל אֶל-לֵאָה תִּנִּי-נָא לִי מִדּוּדָאֵי בִנְךָ:

¹ *Torat Chaim* Bereshit I, רלד.

² *Torat Chaim* Bereshit I, רלד.

Once, at the time of the wheat harvest, Reuben came upon some mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes" (Genesis 30:14)

If Leah refrained from speaking to her sister about their marital situation until this point in their lives, she certainly allowed her voice to be heard about this matter

וְתֹאמַר לָהּ הִמָּעַט קָחְתְּךָ אֶת-אִשִּׁי וּלְקַחְתְּ נֹכַח אֶת-דִּוְרָאִי בְנִי
וְתֹאמַר רַחֵל לָכֵן יִשְׁכַּב עִמָּךְ הַלַּיְלָה תַּחַת דִּוְרָאִי בְנִי:

But she said to Leah, "Was it not enough for you to take away my husband, that you would also take my son's mandrakes?" (Genesis 30:15)

We do not know if Leah was in any way involved in the deception that led to her marriage to Jacob. However, the text clearly states that Rachel was beloved and beautiful, while Leah was not attractive. As discussed in Chapter Two, Jacob never speaks to Leah except when he addresses the two wives together in order to rally their support about moving back to his father's land. One would expect either sister to harbor resentment toward the other. The text clearly speaks about the jealousy of each of the sisters. Rachel envied Leah's procreative skills, while Leah envied the fact that Jacob desired Rachel more than he wanted her. The one advantage that Leah had above her sister was the fact that she could bear children with ease. Asking for these mandrakes--an aphrodisiac according to S'forno³--Rachel hoped that she would have better luck with becoming pregnant. Ramban contends that the fruit might have worked like a fertility drug, enhancing the chances of becoming pregnant.⁴ Leah, knowing that Rachel was desperate to give Jacob sons, knew that she could ask for this condition: to have

³ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit* II, סב.

⁴ *Torat Chaim, Bereshit* II, סב.

Jacob for the evening. Rachel agrees with her sister.

וְתֹאמַר לָהּ הַמַּעַט קָחְתְּךָ אֶת-אִשִּׁי וּלְקַחְתָּ נָם אֶת-דֹּדְאִי בָנִי
וְתֹאמַר רַחֵל לָכֵן יִשְׁכַּב עִמָּךְ הַלַּיְלָה תַּחַת דֹּדְאִי בָנִי

Rachel replied, "I promise, he shall lie with you tonight, in return for your son's mandrakes" (Genesis 30:15)

Rachel assures Leah that Jacob will lie with her that evening in exchange for the fruit. Leah never responds, but she waits for Jacob as he comes back from the fields, and informs him of the deal that she has made with her sister. Unlike men to men speech, where the main intention is for economic gain, this "deal" between the two sisters has a singular goal shared by both sisters: to produce more children for their husband, so that they might be elevated in Jacob's eyes.

♦ BABY in the BASKET

Pharaoh's daughter finds a baby floating in the river. She identifies the child as a Hebrew child and decides to adopt and raise him as her own child. The child's sister appears and addresses the princess:

וְתֹאמַר אַחֲתָהּ אֵל-בֶּת-פַּרְעֹה הָאֵלֶךְ וְקִרְאתִי לָךְ אִשָּׁה מִיִּנְקַת מִן
הָעִבְרִית וְתִינֵק לָךְ אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד: וְתֹאמַר-לָהּ בֶּת-פַּרְעֹה לָכֵי וְתֵלֶךְ
הָעַלְמָה וְתִקְרָא אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד:

Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a Hebrew nurse to suckle the child for you? And Pharaoh's daughter answered, "Yes" (Exodus 2:7-8)

Pharaoh's daughter prepared to raise this child by hiring a wet nurse to care for him. As we

have already discussed in Chapter Three, the princess carries out the negotiations for this nurse on her own, as was the custom in Egypt

ותאמר לה בת-פרעה היליכי את-הילד הזה ותניקוהו לי ואני
אתן את-שכרך ותקח האשה הילד ותניקוהו

And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will pay your wages" (Exodus 2:9)

The only matter concerning Pharaoh's daughter was child-care. One might have expected her to be concerned that by taking the Hebrew child into her custody she might enrage her father who had ordered these children to be put to death. Yet this thought is never attributed to her in the recorded text. She is solely concerned for the maintenance of the child.

Conclusion

It is striking how little women to women speech occurs in the Pentateuch. Each of these three examples revolves around a single issue: identification as other. Lot's daughters, thinking that they were the last people on the face of the earth, wanted to perpetuate the human species, mothering children with their father's seed. They were concerned not with their own futures, but with the perpetuation of the human species. Rachel, desperate to prove herself as a fertile (and therefore productive) wife, asked her sister for the means to accomplish this deed. She perceived herself as wife of Jacob and potential mother of his children. Pharaoh's daughter wanted to provide for the baby she found in the river. She was not concerned for her own well-being--she never once considers the consequences of her actions. Therefore, every one of these acts links women to child-bearing or child-caring situations.

Conclusion

In the past twenty years, many books about male and female differences in communication have been published, and several of these have even become bestsellers. Although it would be futile to analyze the relationship of biblical characters from these texts, this work shows how very little interpersonal relationships have changed since the writing and redacting of the text to the present. However, the purpose of this work is not to apply popular psychology to the lives of biblical characters we "know" only from this text. Often, when men speak to each other they speak about business related matters, or in a business mode. Often, women speak to each other about child care and procreation issues (although not exclusively, of course). Finally, men and women still have difficulty hearing and responding to each other in the course of daily life. The dilemma, when dealing with biblical texts is that we must recognize several facts. First, these are *not* true conversations, rather a summary of such a conversation that might have taken place, or a folk tradition that survived for many years before it became part of the canon of biblical literature. Regardless of how many writers contributed to the total work, or how many redactors edited, it is highly unlikely that *any* of these conversations transpired as written. Second, it is inconceivable that women did not speak in these episodes; rather, the content of their speech was not thought to be as important or vital to the story of the Jewish people.

Although it is not surprising that the Torah contains many more male-centered stories than female-centered ones, the unbalanced nature of men's and women's voices is nevertheless impressive. Of the four categories of speech studied in this work, the most prominent pattern is male voices speaking to other male voices. When they speak, their

conversation revolves almost entirely around business related matters. Their speech patterns are generally confrontational, and often result in the end of a relationship (as in the cases of Moses and Pharaoh, or Jacob and Laban) or the temporary end of a relationship (as in the case of Joseph and his brothers.)

When men speak to women or women speak to men, the relationship is rarely a "healthy" one. In many cases, the characters are portrayed as not knowing *how* to speak to each other. Generally, the men are concerned with matters of national importance, and their relationships with their wives take second precedence. When men and women strive to communicate with each other in these texts, often they have difficulty understanding what the other is attempting to say. For instance, in the above scenario when Rebekah vents to her husband Jacob "Give me children or I shall die!" she is not suicidal, nor is she asking Jacob to "give" her the children. In his book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, author John Gray contends that men and women make several common mistakes in their relationships. For instance, while men tend not to listen or do not ask the correct questions, women tend to feel unloved because in the woman's eyes, men are not attentive or show that they care about the problem that the woman is experiencing. While men tend to minimize the importance of her feelings and her needs, making work more important, women tend to feel unloved because her feelings are invalidated by her partner.¹ This example of direct discourse between husband and wife suggests that men and women had difficulties in communication from a very early time.

In the 1978 book *Silences*, Tillie Olsen records the history of women writers and

¹ Grey, John. *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* 141-142.

points out the relative silence of women as literary voices. She states that the blossoming field of socio-linguistics focuses on male and female paradigms of discourse, sex-linked speech, and differences in conversational patterns according to gender. She states that "Women's talk, in both style (hesitant, qualified, question-posing) and content (concern for the every day, the practical, the interpersonal) is typically devalued by men and women alike."² Olson continues by saying that women speak less in mixed groups and are interrupted more frequently. By the late 1970s feminist sociologists and historians had begun to characterize and compare the *private* familial voice of women with the *communal* voice of men and to tie such differences in voice to sex-role socialization. These studies have indeed blossomed over the past twenty years, and have expanded into the realm of women's voices--or lack thereof--in the biblical text.

Judith Plascow adds that "the most striking examples of women's silence come from texts in which women are most central, for there the normative character of maleness is especially jarring."³ In the Genesis narrative, for example, women are prominently figures in many of the stories presented. These matriarchs of Genesis are all strong women--Leibekah and Tamar notably forceful, while the others each had their moments of strength in the text. Each one of them was fiercely concerned for her children, and often they seem to have an intuitive knowledge of God's plans for their sons. Plascow contends that it appears "from the stories of Sarah and Rebecca that they understand God better than their husbands."⁴ God

² Olsen, Tillie, *Silences* 17.

³ Plascow, Judith *Standing Again at Sinai* 4.

⁴ Plascow, Judith 4.

defends Sarāh when she forces Abraham to cast out Hagar (Genesis 21:12). Rebekah, knowing it is God's intent, deceives Isaac into assuming Jacob as his inheritor (Genesis 25:23, 27:5-17). However, despite their reasons, their scheming, and their cleverness, the women do not receive the covenant or who pass on its lineage. The institute of patrilineal descent and the patriarchal lineage takes precedence over the stories of the matriarch's. Plascow continues:

Their relationship to God, in some way presupposed by the text, remains an undigested element in the narrative. What was the full theophany to Rebekah, and how is it related to the covenant with Isaac? The writer does not tell us, it is not sufficiently important. And so the covenant remains the covenant with Isaac, while Rebekah's experience floats at the margin of the story.⁵

Another issue which is often lacking from the woman's perspective is the matter of sexual issues. Consider the story of Dina--or, shall we say, the story of Dina's brothers vs Dina's perpetrators. She never speaks, she is never spoken to, and her emotions and feeling are never expressed by the narrator or in any other manner. All that we know is the story of the brother's revenge. The biblical authors wrote this story through the eyes of a third party, and through the eyes of her brothers. Rachel attempts to speak to Jacob about her infertility, but her husband admonishes her. There is a lack of compassion and understanding in this case.

Most women are portrayed--in conversation to men and to each other--as mothers and wives, but not as women with their unique and important roles. These narrative reports develop and elucidate the significance of (male) children as a woman's contribution to her

⁵ Plascow, Judith 4.

marriage. "Give me children, or I shall die," cries Rachel to Jacob (Gen 30:1), an appeal repeated by numerous barren biblical wives. As we have read, three of the matriarchs offer their husbands concubines to give birth to offspring in their stead, either to protect the women from childlessness or to augment the offspring of the marriage (Gen. 16:1-3, 30:3-9). Although women appear in many roles in biblical stories, it is the exceptional woman who is not recognized as the mother of a son.⁶ The only role that played any significance in the lives of most of these women was that of wife and mother. The question of the inclusion of women in the covenant by God has always provoked much controversy.

Entry into the covenant at Sinai is the root experience of Judaism, the central event that established the Jewish people. Give the importance of this event, there can be no verse in the Torah more disturbing to the feminist than Moses' warning to his people in Exodus 19:15, "Be ready for the third day, do not go near a woman." For here, at the very moment that the Jewish people stands at Sinai ready to receive the covenant--not now the covenant with individual patriarchs but with the people as a whole--at the very moment when Israel stands trembling waiting for God's presence to descend upon the mountain, Moses addresses the community only as men.... At the central moment of Jewish history, women are invisible. Whether they too stood there trembling in fear and expectation, what they heard when the men heard these words of Moses, we do not know. It was not their experience that interested the chronicler or that informed and shaped the Torah.⁷

Women's voices are relatively silent in the biblical text, and when they are portrayed they are often depicted in relationship to others. This is not to say that women did not play vital roles in the development of the Israelite people. However, these accomplishments are rarely recorded in the text.

⁶ Plascow 173.

⁷ Plascow 25.

There is much that can be learned from contemplating the findings of this work. It is fascinating to realize how little our society has changed with reference to our conception of genders assignment. In general, men are still presumed to place business matters above all else, even at the expense of family. Although many women have successful business careers, we often hear those that do speak about their conflicting feelings regarding the changing family structure--we are slowly learning to adapt to the dual-income lifestyle, but with difficulty. Men and women continue to learn how better our own.

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