

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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"May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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4 TEVES

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS MIKEITZ

Pharaoh's Delusion

It happened at the end of two years: Pharaoh was dreaming, and behold, he was standing on the [Nile] river (Bereishis 41:1).

The *Gamara* states in *Maseches Brachos* that as a dream only reflects what one thought about during the day, it should never contain elements so surreal as to be impossible, such as an elephant passing through the eye on a needle. This *possuk's* account of Pharaoh's dream seems to violate that principle: For a person to stand on the surface of a river is a physical impossibility, just as it is impossible for an elephant to pass through the eye of a needle. How could Pharaoh have seen this in his dream?

In truth, later in the *parsha*, Pharaoh tells Yosef that in his dream he was standing "on the bank of the river," rather than on the surface of the water itself. But if that is what this *possuk* meant, it should have made that statement explicitly. The Torah here seems to indicate that Pharaoh dreamed that he was actually standing on the water. How can this be so?

The answer is that Pharaoh was able to dream that he was standing on the water because he believed himself to be a deity. In Pharaoh's view it wasn't an impossibility, it was actually a reflection of how he thought of himself during the day.

This is reflected later on when he refuses to obey the command of Hashem because he felt that, as a deity, he had the right to disagree with Hashem.

At the *bris bein habesarim*, Hashem had promised Avraham Aninu that he would "judge" the nation that would enslave his descendants, and Rashi there explains that this promise refers to the Ten *Makkos*. Thus, in order for Hashem's promise to Avraham to be fulfilled, it was necessary for Pharaoh to have the delusion of godhood and therefore believe he had the right to refuse Hashem—thereby necessitating the



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Makkos.

This also answers another question raised here: A basic tenet of dreams is that there is no dream without "*devarim beteilim*," idle or meaningless components. But what component of Pharaoh's dream was not meaningful or symbolic? In light of the above, it was this detail, the fact that Pharaoh was standing on the Nile itself, which served as the "*devarim beteilim*" of the dream. In this case, though, the "*devarim beteilim*" also had a purpose: to allow Pharaoh to believe his delusions of godhood, thus setting the stage for the Ten *Makkos* that would proceed Bnei Yisroel's liberation from Egypt.

Bargaining Cup

He searched; he began with the oldest and ended with the youngest; the goblet was found in Binyamin's sack (44:12).

At the end of this week's *parsha*, as the brothers are finally permitted to leave and return to Eretz Yisroel laden with the food they had acquired in Mitzrayim, Yosef sabotages them by having his silver cup of divination placed surreptitiously in Binyamin's sack. He then has the brothers pursued and accused of stealing his special goblet.

The brothers vehemently deny the

accusation and point out that they had even returned the money that they had found in their sack from the previous trip. They conclude with: "*Anyone among your servants that the goblet is found shall be put to death and the rest of us will be slaves to our master*" (44:9).

Once the goblet is found in Binyamin's sack the brothers were beside themselves.

They began yelling at Binyamin "you're a

thief, the son of a thief!" – referring to the fact that his mother Rochel stole the idols from her father Lavan when they snuck away and left Charan (see *Midrash Tanchuma* and *Bereishis Rabbah* ad loc).

However, this characterization requires some understanding. Being a thief isn't part of one's DNA – a gene that is passed down from a parent. At most, it is a learned outcome from growing up in a

All for One and One for All

We are ready to be slaves to my lord, both we and the one in whose hand the goblet was found (44:16).

When the brothers were tracked down and confronted with the accusation of stealing Yosef's silver goblet, they were aghast and exclaimed; *"The one among your servants with whom it is found shall die and we also will become slaves to my lord"* (44:9). But their offer was rejected as being too much: *"He replied even now, as you say so it is; the one with whom it is found shall be a slave, but the rest of you shall be exonerated"* (44:10).

Sure enough, after the goblet was found in Binyamin's sack and they return to stand in front of Yosef, they make Yosef the same offer; *"Here we are, we are ready to be slaves to my lord, both we and the one in whose hand the goblet was found"* (44:16). But Yosef reiterates his position, *"it would be unseemly for me to do this, the man in whose possession the goblet was found, he shall be my slave, and as for the rest of you – go up in peace to your father"* (44:17).

This confrontation, and Yosef's response,

leads to the epic showdown between Yehuda and Yosef. Yosef wants to punish only Binyamin with servitude while allowing the rest of the brothers the freedom to go.

However, Yehuda's response to Binyamin's predicament is hard to fathom. Why does he offer up all of the other brothers to be slaves as well? As devastating as it would be for Yaakov to lose Binyamin to slavery in Egypt, it would be tenfold more painful to lose ALL of his sons to the same fate! What could Yehuda possibly be thinking?

It must be that Yehuda was offering Yosef a compromise of sorts: Yehuda seems to be offering Yosef the amount of years of slavery he could expect to get from Binyamin, but divided amongst him and the rest of the brothers so that they could work off the debt more quickly together. This appears to be a more than fair deal; after all, the brothers were a formidable group. They would be far more useful as

slaves in service than just their smaller and younger brother.

This offer is also the beginning of Yehuda and his brothers owning up to the responsibility of abandoning a brother to an unknown fate. After all, they had all conspired in the selling of Yosef as a slave. Standing up for Binyamin was an indication that they had understood their previous mistake and were unwilling to once again allow a brother to suffer the consequences of his own foolish actions.

In their minds, Binyamin had committed a heinous crime, one with severe consequences. Still, they joined as a brotherhood to try to bail him out of his mistake with an offer that calls for great personal sacrifice – many years of slavery. Yosef finally sees that his brothers have really changed and this leads to his showdown with Yehuda and his ultimate revelation as their long lost brother.

Bargaining Cup Continued

certain environment. But Binyamin never spent any time with his mother because she died in childbirth. What does his taking of the goblet have to do with his mother taking Lavan's idols?

Furthermore, it isn't just Rochel who is accused of stealing, his father Yaakov was accused of stealing the *brachos* belonging to Eisav and the Torah actually says that Yaakov "stole" the heart of Lavan (31:20). Why are they associating Binyamin's supposed thievery as emanating solely from his mother?

The commentaries attempt to explain why Rochel actually took her father's idols. Rashi (31:19) explains that she wanted to separate Lavan from idol worship (31:19).

But this is incomplete at best. If Rochel's sole intent was to remove her father from the idols, why didn't she just dispose of them the minute they were far enough away? She could have easily tossed them over the first bridge she came across and no one would have been the wiser. Why did she hold on to them?

Lavan had mercilessly persecuted Yaakov, and Rochel and Leah also felt mistreated by their father, who basically sold them to Yaakov in exchange for years of labor. In fact, Lavan, upon catching up to them, exclaims that had God not appeared to him the night before he would have harmed them, and in the Haggadah we actually say that he tried to destroy Yaakov. Rochel knew how precious the idols were to her father, and thus seemed to have taken his idols as leverage should

he ever threaten them again.

So too Binyamin, ostensibly, could have been perceived as taking Yosef's special goblet of divination as a future bargaining chip. After all, every time the brothers came down to buy food Yosef persecuted them; cross examining them, calling them liars, and even taking a hostage. It would have been natural for one of them to consider how to ensure that their future food purchases would go a little more smoothly. By taking away his goblet of divination, Binyamin could have gotten a measure of leverage over Yosef, just as his mother had done to her father. This is the narrative that Yosef tried to portray, and the brothers fell for it, blaming Binyamin for being like his mother.



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