



## Sefer Bereishis - Parshas Mikeitz

### Jumping Through Hoops

Eliezer was Avraham's faithful attendant and steward. So trusted, that he was sent to find a suitable young woman for his master's son and heir, Yitzchak. Avraham was a well established figure, presiding over a large community; having displayed his valor, skill, and bravery at war, in addition to his considerable generosity and integrity. Finding a match should have been straightforward, albeit a potentially drawn out process.

Yet Eliezer displays anxiety and worry throughout, and seems eager to complete the job as quickly as possible. He prays, as though the onus is entirely on him, as if Avraham and Yitzchak weren't also concerned; his prayer consisted of a request that the intended girl present herself, rather than him searching for potential suitors as was his remit. But why was he so worried?

Years later, when the disguised Yosef instructed his brothers to bring Binyamin before him, Yehuda went to Canaan, and told his father that he would take full responsibility and liability for him, no matter what. This included accidents beyond all control; Yehuda would still be liable. Why add such a condition?

The Sochatchover teaches that when there is no pressure to succeed, a person can give up at the first sign of trouble. Every difficulty takes on epic proportions, and becomes "uncontrollable". But if a person is challenged to succeed, he will persist and somehow manage against the odds. President Kennedy explained the goal of sending a man to the moon: "We choose to go to the moon... not because [it is] easy, but because [it is] hard, because that goal will serve to organize... the best of our energies and skills..." Working at easy things means never having to fail, but it also means never fully testing or exercising one's potential. When a person is forced to work at something hard, he uncovers all kinds of hidden and latent ability that can make the impossible into the achievable.

If Yehudah was charged with being responsible for Binyamin "as best as he could", he might not have stood up to Yosef because an "accident" absolved him. But when charged with returning Binyamin, no matter what, Yehudah knew he had to rise to the challenge. The added responsibility served to bring out the extra reserves of courage and perseverance that otherwise might have lain dormant and untapped.

The Shem MiShmuel explains that for similar reasons, Eliezer had a daughter of marriageable age. Every girl he met could be declined, and on his return, he could pass off his failure as beyond his control, and then subtly note that his daughter was marriageable... Yehudah took full responsibility for Binyamin to account for “uncontrollable” things, and Eliezer feared that his personal biases would disturb his focus. R’ Chaim Brown notes that this explains Eliezer’s sense of urgency, and desire for certainty.

Eliezer knew that when dismissing potential suitors, he would always doubt his motivations for doing so. Eliezer asked for the right girl to present herself to him immediately, and asked for Hashem to remove any need for deliberation. He prioritized his mission so absolutely to the extent that we only find out about his daughter after he completes his task and Rivka has been selected. Ultimately, these efforts not only cleared his conscience, but left Lavan and Besuel with incontrovertible proof that Rivka was meant for Yitzchak.

The eyes can’t see anything if the mind is blind. Perception is so crucial to attitude, and by changing the way you think about things, you’ll change the way you see them. When adversity presents itself, consider that the gauntlet has been lain down, to provide the impetus to force more from you; and watch yourself rise to the challenge.

## Seeing What’s in Front of You

During the famine in Canaan, Yakov sent his sons to Egypt, and they were captured and imprisoned. Unbeknownst to them, their captor was actually their long lost brother Yosef. In prison, they discussed their situation:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל-אָחִיו, אָבֵל אַשְׁמִים אָנַחְנוּ עַל-אָחִינוּ, אֲשֶׁר רָאִינוּ צָרַת נַפְשׁוֹ בְּהִתְחַנְּנוֹ אֵלֵינוּ, וְלֹא שָׁמַעְנוּ; עַל-כֵּן בָּאָה אֵלֵינוּ, הַצָּרָה הַזֹּאת –

The brothers lamented to each other, “We are guilty for what we did to our brother! We saw his suffering, when he pleaded with us, and we ignored him! We have brought this on ourselves!” (42:21)

But on reviewing the entire episode, no reference is made to Yosef talking to them once their decision was made to get rid of him.

R’ Shlomo Freifeld suggests a beautifully simple truism as a resolution.

When a person doesn’t want to see something, they are literally blind to it. To the brothers eyes, their minds were made up – he was gone. Of course he begged and cried; but did they notice? Not at all – and the Torah records that he didn’t make a sound, because they were the actors in that story. To their eye, he didn’t make a noise.

It was only in hindsight, sitting in jail, that they could take stock and relive their terrible ordeal. They saw events with no bias, and realized their folly. They couldn’t see the forest for all the trees.

## Random searches?

To ensnare his brothers, Yosef planted money that the brothers discovered on the way back home, and returned it. On their second visit, having gotten Shimon freed from jail by bringing Binyamin, Yosef ensnared them again, by planting a goblet in Binyamin's sack:

– וַיִּחְפֹּשׂ בַּגְּדוֹל הַחֵל וּבִקְטָן כָּלָה וַיִּמְצָא הַגְּבִיעַ בְּאִמְתַּחַת בְּנִימִן –

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

The Midrash says that the eldest referred to was in fact Shimon, not Reuven, and Binyamin was the next to be searched; not the whole family in order. The Brisker Rav wonders how the Midrash reached this conclusion.

The Maharil Diskin notes that after returning the earlier planted money the brothers could claim: הֲנֵן כֶּסֶף אֲשֶׁר מִצְאָנוּ בְּפִי אִמְתַּחַת תֵּינוּ הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ אֵלֵינוּ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וְאֵיךְ נִגְנַב מִבֵּית אָדֹנָיךְ כֶּסֶף – אוֹ זָהָב: –

“The money we found in the mouth of our sacks we returned to you from the land of Canaan; so how could we steal from your master's house silver or gold?”. (44:8)

This had displayed their honesty, which was not in doubt.

However, two people could not argue this – Shimon and Binyamin. Binyamin had not been there, he could hardly say he was as honest as his brothers who had returned Yosef's gold! All the while, Shimon had been imprisoned for the duration of their first journey back, to ensure their return with Binyamin.

So the Midrash deduces that the Torah is actually stating us that the only people who were searched were the oldest and youngest, of the people whose honesty had not been proven, Binyamin and Shimon!

## Why did Paroh believe Yosef?

Paroh dreams a bizarre dream, that is in fact a premonition of events to come:

– וַהֲרִיב מִן הַיָּאֵר עֹלֹת שִׁבְעַת פָּרוֹת יְפוֹת מְרֻאָה וּבְרִיאֹת בָּשָׂר וַתִּרְעִינָה בְּאָחוּ –

And behold, from the Nile were coming up seven cows, of attractive appearance and robust flesh, and they pastured in the marshland. (41:2)

Yosef offers an interpretation – but why does Paroh so readily accept it? The assurance of an out of favour butler is not sufficient enough to base government on policy on the word of a young prisoner. What did Paroh perceive in Yosef's interpretation?

It is interesting to note that the words יְפוֹת מְרֻאָה are used, which is loosely translated as having “attractive appearance”. This is imprecise. We find in 29:17, that וַעֲיַיִן יֵאָהֵר כֹּחוֹ – וַרְחֵל הָיְתָה יְפֹת תֵּאֵר וַיְפֹת מְרֻאָה –

Leah's eyes were tender, but Rachel had beautiful features and a beautiful countenance.”

What is the difference between תֵּאַר and מְרֻאָה? Rashi there explains that תֵּאַר is physical beauty, and מְרֻאָה is the radiance of the countenance – coarsely the vibe they give off. In Hebrew, חן.

The Torah records that Pharaoh dreamed of יְפוֹת מְרֻאָה cows, radiantly beautiful cows. If the premise sounds absurd to you, you're not alone: it did to Pharaoh too! When he recounted his dream to Yosef, he changed what he saw to יְפֹת תֵּאַר, physically attractive cows, rather than what he'd seen, יְפוֹת מְרֻאָה radiant cows.

When Paroh heard Yosef speak about something he had deliberately neglected to mention, he believed Yosef. Cows don't have personalities or spirits: people do. People with shining countenances are happy and do not envy each other – these are the years of plenty.

Paroh had no idea how to explain it, and fudged it a little. But Yosef picked up on it and caught him out – that's how he knew Yosef was for real!

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