

Bar Mitsvah: A few words about the Sidra and Yossef.

From parashat Va yeshev until the end of Va-yehi, thus in Va-yesheh, Mikets, Va yigash and Va-Yehi, Yossef is the central personage. The Torah dwells lengthily on him, more than any other biblical personage. Hazal drew an unflattering portrait of Yossef: He was seventeen but he behaved like a child. He took care of his look and walked on a lofty way, he combed out his hair. In short he was much preoccupied with his look. More he was a tale-bearer and reported his brothers' misdeeds to his father. He specially got against the son's of Leah. Hazal also criticized the affective and material preference and favoritism of Ya'akov toward Yossef. The gemara writes in Shabbat 10b.

אמר רבא בר מחסיא אמר רבי חמא בר גוריא אמר רב: לעולם אל ישנה אדם בנו בין הבנים שבשביל משקל שני סלעים מילת, שנתן יעקב ליוסף, משאר בניו נתקנאו בו אחיו ונתגלגל הדבר וירדו אבותינו למצרים

It was said in the name of Rav that a man should not give a special treatment to one son with regard of the others. Indeed because of a dress of a weight of 2 sela of silk fabrics that ya'akov gave to Yossef more than to the other brothers, they became jealous of him and things hung together until they descended to Egypt. Rambam in Hilkhoh Nahalot 6;13 writes צו חכמים שלא ישנה אדם בין הבנים בחייו אפילו בדבר מועט שלא יבואו לידי תחרות וקנאה כאחי יוסף עם יוסף. הלכות נחלות

The sages ordered that a man should not make difference between a son among the other sons even a little difference so that they would not enter into any rivalry and hatred as between Joseph's brothers and Yossef. When we sum up Yossef was not a very sympathetic adolescent. A last element must be mentioned, it was apparently the major cause of the hatred between him and his brothers, who considered even to kill him: his dreams attesting his wishes of greatness and superiority. We met already dreams in the beginning of Bereshit: Abraham at Berit ben Habetarim (Gen 15;17), Avimelekh about Sarah (Gen 20;3), Ya'akov and the ladder (Gen 28;12) Jacob and the goats (Gen 31;10-11) Lavan at the end of the run after Ya'akov (Gen 31;24). In all these cases we have a prophetic dream. It does not mean that Avimelekh or Lavan had reached the rank of prophet. The dream does not comprise any story or event; it is rather a divine message. God speaks to man in dream. The man understands perfectly the message and has no doubt or interrogation after his waking. But here in Va-Yeshev and until the end of Genesis we have another type of dream. The biblical text does not invoke divine intervention in the dream. It seems a normal dream; but it is symbolic and marks the dreamer who does not understand the message and remains preoccupied after his waking. The two dreams of Yossef were not difficult to understand and they increased the hatred of the brothers. The reaction of Ya'kov was ?מה החלום הזה אשר חלמת? how do you dare dreaming and still more telling to your brothers such stupid things which can only increase their hatred?

Now let us try to draw a portrait of Yossef grown up. Our difficult teenager is hardly recognizable. We note that Yoseph is an exceptional organizer and administrator. More he must have great communication ability, he can win the confidence and he is indeed a trustworthy and zealous higher official. Think about the social revolution that he succeeds imposing to the Egyptian people without any revolt and revolution. He achieves what the greediest tyrant would never have imagined. He buys the fields of the farmers and their livestock and finally their own bodies against the wheat that the same farmers warehoused a few years before in the municipal silos. Without resistance, without revolts, unbelievable! He is very different from his ancestors. They were stockbreeders. They were independent, depending on no one. Ya'akov who depended on Lavan, strove to recover his independence and to make a fortune. By contrast Yossef will be all his life a CEO, first in the private sector and then in the public sector; but never completely independent. He seems to hold a MBA

from the best Universities and a MS in psychology and he will work all his life as a CEO. His target is not, apparently, to become independent. But in fact we don't know; maybe it was more by necessity than by conviction. By contrast he will do the necessary to preserve the independence of his brothers. Now Egypt must have been a regime similar to Russia under Stalin and the KGB or North Korea under the present dictator Kim Jong Un. Yossef. When he became special adviser of the King and even viceroy, he, certainly, belonged to the nomenclatura but nevertheless he could not communicate freely with abroad. He was probably afraid to be suspected of collusion with the enemy. This seems to me the only explanation why Yossef who became special adviser of the King at the age of 30 will not address the least message to his father during 9 years, the seven years of abundance and the two first years of famine. When he accedes to his high position, Pharaoh marries him to the daughter of a priest with the intention to assimilate him. Hazal hold only this positive point of Yossef adult: the high standard of morality of Yossef and his attachment to the Hebrew tradition (remember that he did not eat with the Egyptians and didn't want to be buried in Egypt. His sons had Hebrew names. Apparently converts his wife to the fidelity of the god of Avraham).

Yossef has another string to his bow; he can interpret dreams. We have seen that he has all the capacity necessary to his function of CEO. But it is through this interpretative capacity that he will succeed evolving in life from one job to the other and escaping to his condition of prisoner. More fundamentally the dreams of different persons and his interpretative capacity will constitute the clue of the mysterious and exceptional events taking place in the last parshiot of Bereshit and bringing the family of Ya'akov in Egypt. Yossef interprets correctly the dreams of the cupbearer and the pastry cook of the King. This will suffice to free him from prison and bring him before Pharaoh. The interpretation of these first dreams could be easily checked after three days but the interpretation of the King's dreams was more problematic. It was only after seven years, at the beginning of the eighth year that it was possible to have a first check and to write: כאשר אמר יוסף. And now began the days of starvation, as Yossef had foreseen (Gen 41;54). Nevertheless Yossef, with his exceptional gift of the gab, persuades or rather bewitches the King. It is indeed above all sense of logic to nominate a responsible of such a national project of struggle for the life of a country with the title of viceroy on such a basis, the interpretation of two dreams of the king. Even Raspoutine, the favorite of the tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna, could not succeed such an enterprise at the Court of the Tsar. Now once the brothers arrive in Egypt to buy food, why all these events, the restitution of the money, the locking of Shimon, the obligation to bring Binjamin, the stealing of Yossef's cup, the sending of wagons to carry his father? Yossef did however not burden himself with the pain of his father during the last 9 years. Why didn't he communicate to his father that he was living? Ramban asks all these questions in his commentary on Gen 42;9 on the verse

ויכר יוסף את אחיו והם לא הכירוהו. ויזכור יוסף את החלומות אשר חלם להם...

Yossef recognized his brothers but they did not recognize him. Yossef remembered the dreams that he dreamt about them... Yossef in the meantime became an expert in the interpretation of dreams and now he remembers his youth dreams and suddenly he fixes himself the aim to materialize these dreams. This is in short the long explanation of Ramban. That means that in the case of Yossef's dreams, finally old dreams which were already forgotten, Yossef wants to bring them back to life. The fulfillment of these dreams is not natural as in the other cases, but Yossef becomes an actor and he is the one who pulls the strings and wants to force the events. But Ramban fails to explain why Yossef remained silent during nine years. As I proposed above Yossef had not a complete liberty. He was followed by the KGB or the NSA maybe without the knowledge of the Pharaoh. Maybe some state administrations were jealous of the lashing ascension of Yossef and didn't trust this

adventurer and in addition a stranger. Apparently we have here two levels of history; the great history or the general history of the nations: Yossef the viceroy of Egypt struggling against the starvation and reinforcing the royal power but supervised by the services of the counter-espionage and from the other side the little history in the great history: The history of the family of Jacobs. Yossef settles his accounts with his brothers and family and, without noticing it, he shapes the destiny of the family of Jacob and the future of Israel. In fact what is exactly the great history and what is exactly the little history? For hazal the important history is the biblical narration of the history of the descendants of Abraham and the materialization of the divine intention by unpredictable ways.

I hope that this non-conformist glance at our sidras will help you thinking again about this exceptional narration which explains us how a Hebrew family of Palestine ends in Egypt following a relentless fate that Hazal qualified: אנוס על פי הדיבור, the ancient announcement of brit ben ha-Betarim כי גר יהיה זרעך בארץ לא להם .