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Parashat HaShavuah Series

Parashat Miketz

Notwithstanding his last, tragic encounter with his brothers, Joseph's reception of Jacob's ten sons appears disturbing.

וַיְדַבֵּר אִתָּם קָשׁוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מֵאֵין בָּאתֶם .

"...and he [Joseph] spoke with them harshly and said to them, 'from where did you come?' ..." (Gen. 42:7)

After so many years, shouldn't the great Joseph – who interprets dreams, rules over Egypt, and retains great love for his father and brothers – forgive, or at least offer some mercy to his brothers? Why does he accuse them of being spies and why is Benjamin's presence needed to prove their honesty?

The Torah tells us that, as the brothers entered his court, Joseph remembered his dreams.

וַיִּזְכֹּר יוֹסֵף אֶת הַחֲלֻמוֹת אֲשֶׁר חָלַם לָהֶם

"And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them...." (Gen. 42:9)
 Rashi suggests that at this point, Joseph realized that his dreams of sheaves and the sun, moon and stars bowing to him (Gen. 37:5-9), which earlier had infuriated the brothers, would now be fulfilled.

The count, however, was off.

While in his dreams, eleven sheaves and eleven stars had bowed before Joseph, in his court there were only ten brothers. The subjection of these ten brothers, while likely appeasing his hurt ego, would not fulfill the prophecy of his dreams. Joseph, therefore, had to take drastic measures to persuade the brothers to bring Benjamin to Egypt and fulfill the Divine intention. He accused his brothers of espionage, held Simeon hostage and demanded that the others return home and bring Benjamin, thereby ensuring that all eleven brothers would prostrate themselves before him.

The bible has a long history of protagonists taking drastic actions in order to fulfill prophecy.

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The Union for Traditional Judaism is a trans-denominational organization dedicated to bringing the message of open-minded Halakhic Judaism to the widest possible audience.

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Sarah, still barren in her old age, insisted that Abraham and Hagar conceive in order that Abraham could become the father of a great nation. (Gen. 16:2)

Rebecca, pregnant with feuding twins, is told by God that two nations are in her womb and the older will serve the younger (Gen. 25:22-23). Later, when the elder, Esau, was about to receive the blessing from Isaac, Rebecca acted to ensure Jacob's position (Gen. 27:4-10).

Sarah, Rebecca and Joseph each realized that they had a key role to play in fulfilling God's divine plan. No matter how deterministic their outlook, their pragmatism was a key ingredient in bringing the end to fruition.

Many of us have been captivated by the new TV series Flash Forward. The basic premise of the show is that the entire world lost consciousness for 137 seconds during which they were given a brief glimpse of their lives six months in the future. They received a global 'Flash Forward'. Both empowered and debilitated by this pre-knowledge, the characters debate if they will simply allow time to pass to see if their vision will be realized or if they will actively work towards achieving a vision of the future.

Joseph's message is clear. God's vision of the future is one built on a partnership between His divine plan and our activism. It is only by taking an active role in the world that we can partner with God in His ongoing creation.

Shabbat Shalom!

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