

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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After two years' time, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, ²when out of the Nile there came up seven cows, handsome and sturdy, and they grazed in the reed grass. ³But presently, seven other cows came up from the Nile close behind them, ugly and gaunt, and stood beside the cows on the bank of the Nile; ⁴and the ugly gaunt cows ate up the seven handsome sturdy cows. And Pharaoh awoke.

⁵He fell asleep and dreamed a second time: Seven ears of grain, solid and healthy, grew on a

מֵא וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁנָתַיִם יָמִים
וּפְרָעָה חֹלֵם וַהֲנֵה עֵמֶד עַל-הַיָּאָר:
²וַהֲנֵה מִן-הַיָּאָר עֹלָת שֶׁבַע פָּרוֹת יְפוֹת
מֵרְאָה וּבְרִיאַת בָּשָׂר וַתִּרְעִינָה בְּאֲחוֹ:
³וַהֲנֵה שֶׁבַע פָּרוֹת אֲחֵרוֹת עֲלֹות
אֲחֵרִיָּהֶן מִן-הַיָּאָר רָעוֹת מֵרְאָה וְדָקוֹת
בָּשָׂר וַתַּעֲמִדְנָה אֶצֶל הַפָּרוֹת עַל-שֹׁפֶת
הַיָּאָר: ⁴וַתֹּאכְלֶנָּה הַפָּרוֹת רָעוֹת
הַמֵּרְאָה וְדָקוֹת הַבָּשָׂר אֶת שֶׁבַע הַפָּרוֹת
יְפֹת הַמֵּרְאָה וַהֲבִיאַת וַיִּקֶּץ פְּרָעָה:
⁵וַיִּשָּׁן וַיִּחְלֹם שְׁנִית וַהֲנֵה | שֶׁבַע שִׁבְלִים

JOSEPH'S LIBERATION AND RISE TO POWER (41:1–56)

Dreams, the cause of Joseph's misfortunes, become the means of his rise to power.

PHARAOH'S DREAMS (vv. 1–8)

1. After two years' time Literally, "at the end of two years of days." Two complete years have elapsed since the release of the cupbearer.

the Nile A fateful setting for Pharaoh's

dream. The river was the lifeline of Egypt, the fountainhead of its entire economy.

2. seven cows Cows were abundant in Egypt and important to the economy. The motif of seven cows is found in Egyptian paintings and texts.

3. close behind them That is, in time.

5. on a single stalk A clear symbol of abundance.

CHAPTER 41

This *parashah* is almost always read during the week of *Hanukkah*. Although that is only a coincidence of the calendar, we can find thematic connections. Just as *Hanukkah* celebrates the victory of the weak over the powerful, the *parashah* begins with Pharaoh's dream of the lean cows conquering the well-fed ones. As the *parashah* begins with Joseph in prison and ends with Joseph as ruler, the story of *Hanukkah* begins with Israel oppressed and ends with Israel triumphant and independent.

1. standing by the Nile The literal meaning is "over the Nile." This prompted the Rabbinic comment that Jews see themselves as subservient to God and dependent on God, whereas idolaters see themselves as superior to their gods. (The Nile was a god to the Egyptians, source of life and food.) Judaism teaches us how to serve God. Pagan religions teach their

followers how to use and manipulate their gods (Gen. R. 89:4).

4. This must be every tyrant's nightmare, that one day the weak will rise up and overthrow the powerful.

5ff. One of the lessons of the Joseph story, reinforced by its being read as autumn gives way to winter, is that life is cyclical. Good years are followed by lean years, adversity is followed by success, rejection yields to connection, winter gives way to spring and summer, only to return again. "What can be learned from this *parashah* to prepare ourselves in good days, days in which holiness is revealed, to set the light in our hearts, to be there in times when holiness seems far off?" The author of *S'fat Emet* answers his own question: We must store up resources of faith, even as the Egyptians stored grain, to nourish us spiritually when events turn against us.

single stalk. ⁶But close behind them sprouted seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind. ⁷And the thin ears swallowed up the seven solid and full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke: it was a dream!

⁸Next morning, his spirit was agitated, and he sent for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men; and Pharaoh told them his dreams, but none could interpret them for Pharaoh.

⁹The chief cupbearer then spoke up and said to Pharaoh, "I must make mention today of my offenses. ¹⁰Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and placed me in custody in the house of the chief steward, together with the chief baker. ¹¹We had dreams the same night, he and I, each of us a dream with a meaning of its own. ¹²A 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. ¹³And as he interpreted for us, so it came to pass: I was restored to my post, and the other was impaled."

6. scorched by the east wind This is the sir-
occo that blows in from the desert.

7. it was a dream This was much to Pharaoh's surprise, for it all seemed so vivid.

8. his spirit was agitated Apparently, Pharaoh spent a sleepless night after his dreams, anxiously awaiting the dawn.

magicians Magic was a feature of Egyptian life. Although Israel shared with its pagan neighbors a belief in the reality of dreams as a medium of divine communication, it never developed a class of magicians or dream interpreters, as Egypt and Mesopotamia did.

wise men This is a translation of *hakhamim*, the first use of the stem חכם in the Bible. Here the term refers to those who possessed specialized knowledge and skill in the magic arts.

none could interpret them for Pharaoh It is inconceivable that the professional dream in-

עלות בקנה אחד בריאות וטבות: ⁶והנה
שבע שבלים דקות ושדופת קדים
צמחות אחריהן: ⁷ותבלענה השבלים
הדקות את שבע השבלים הבריאות
והמלאות וייקץ פרעה והנה חלום:
⁸ויהי בבקר ותפעם רוחו וישלח ויקרא
את כל חרטמי מצרים ואת כל חכמי
ויספר פרעה להם את חלמו ואין פותר
אותם לפרעה:

⁹וידבר שר המשקים את פרעה לאמר
את חטאי אני מזכיר היום: ¹⁰פרעה
קצף על עבדיו ויתן אתי במשמר בית
שר הטבחים אתי ואת שר האפים:
¹¹ונחלמה חלום בלילה אחד אני והוא
איש כפתרון חלמו חלמנו: ¹²ושם אתנו
נער עברי עבד לשר הטבחים ונספר לו
ויפתר לנו את חלמתינו איש כחלמו
פתר: ¹³ויהי כאשר פתורנו כן היה
אתי השיב על בני ואתו תלה:

terpreters were unable to provide any interpreta-
tions. Their interpretations, however, did not
satisfy the king in a manner that he found con-
vincing.

THE CUPBEARER REMEMBERS JOSEPH (vv. 9–13)

9. I must make mention The stem of the
word for "making mention" (*mazkir*) is used by
Joseph in his plea in 40:14 and by the narrator
in reporting the ingratitude of the cupbearer in
40:23. The use of the same verbal root in both
incidents is intended to draw our attention to
the relationship between the two.

of my offenses Against Pharaoh and against
Joseph.

12. A Hebrew youth The cupbearer stops
short of recommending that Joseph, a servant,
be brought to Pharaoh.

12. The chief cupbearer tries to justify his
forgetfulness by emphasizing Joseph's un-
worthiness, describing him as a youth, a for-
eigner, and a servant.

¹⁴Thereupon Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was rushed from the dungeon. He had his hair cut and changed his clothes, and he appeared before Pharaoh. ¹⁵And 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." ¹⁶Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "Not I! God will see to Pharaoh's welfare."

¹⁷Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream, I was standing on the bank of the Nile, ¹⁸when out of the Nile came up seven sturdy and well-formed cows and grazed in the reed grass. ¹⁹Presently 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! ²⁰And the seven lean and ugly cows ate up the first seven cows, the sturdy ones; ²¹but when they had consumed them, one could not tell that they had consumed them, for they looked just as bad as before. And I awoke. ²²In my other dream, I

¹⁴וַיִּשְׁלַח פַּרְעֹה וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־יֹסֵף וַיְרִיצֵהוּ מִן־הַבּוֹר וַיַּגְלֵחַ וַיַּחֲלֵף שְׂמֹלֹתָיו וַיָּבֹא אֶל־פַּרְעֹה: ¹⁵וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יֹסֵף חֲלֹמֹתִי וּפְתָר אֵין אֹתוֹ וְאֲנִי שֹׁמֵעַתִּי עֲלֶיךָ לֹא־אֶמָּר תִּשְׁמַע חֲלוֹם לִפְתָּר אֹתוֹ: ¹⁶וַיַּעַן יֹסֵף אֶת־פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר בְּלִעְדֵּי אֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶה אֶת־שְׁלוֹם פַּרְעֹה: ¹⁷וַיַּדְבֵּר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יֹסֵף בְּחִלְמֵי הַנָּהָר עֹמֵד עַל־שֹׁפֶת הַיָּאֵר: ¹⁸וַהֲנִה מִן־הַיָּאֵר עֹלֹת שֶׁבַע פָּרוֹת בְּרִיאֹת בָּשָׂר וַיִּפֹּת תָּאֵר וַתִּרְעִינָה בָּאָחוּ: ¹⁹וַהֲנִה שֶׁבַע פָּרוֹת אַחֲרוֹת עֹלֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶן דֵּלוֹת וְרַעוֹת תָּאֵר מְאֹד וְרָקוֹת בָּשָׂר לֹא־רָאִיתִי כַּהֲנָה בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לָרַע: ²⁰וַתֹּאכְלֵנָה הַפָּרוֹת הָרָקוֹת וַהֲרַעוּ אֶת שֶׁבַע הַפָּרוֹת הָרֵאשֹׁנוֹת הַבְּרִיאֹת: ²¹וַתִּבְאֲנֶה אֶל־קִרְבָּנָהּ וְלֹא נֹדַע כִּי־בָאוּ אֶל־קִרְבָּנָהּ וַיִּמְרְאוּהָ רָע כַּאֲשֶׁר בְּתַחֲלָה וַאֲיָקֻץ: ²²וַאֲרָא בְּחִלְמֵי וַהֲנִה | שֶׁבַע

JOSEPH'S DREAM INTERPRETATION

(vv. 14–32)

14. he was rushed The verbs in this verse indicate a series of actions performed in swift succession in the atmosphere of urgency created when Pharaoh's wishes are to be satisfied.

dungeon See Comment to 40:15.

his hair cut The verb meaning "to shave" (גלח) applies to both the head and the face. Egyptian men shaved both areas.

his clothes Clothes have consistently been a key element in Joseph's misfortunes. This change of clothing marks the beginning of his liberation.

15. no one can interpret See Comment to verse 8.

for you to hear a dream Pharaoh believes that Joseph is endowed with magical power.

16. God will see Joseph is saying, in effect, "God will respond to me and grant Pharaoh's

welfare." He is certain that the sudden turn of events that has brought him into the presence of Pharaoh is providential for him. And he believes that he will receive a dream interpretation from God that will satisfy Pharaoh entirely.

17. Then Pharaoh said The repetition of the dreams to Joseph contains differences from the original narration. Such variations between an initial version and a repeat of it are a recurring feature of biblical discourse.

19. never had I seen This previously unstated personal observation points to the real meaning of the dream.

21. but when This entire verse is not in Pharaoh's original narrative. Here, it directs attention to the key element (see vv. 30ff.).

22. In my other dream Significantly, the phrase (v. 5) "a second time" is omitted, as though Pharaoh himself realized that the two dreams are really one.

14. Joseph, who twice was stripped of his clothes and thrown into a pit, is twice (here and in v. 42) elevated in status and given new clothes to mark his new position.

saw seven ears of grain, full and healthy, growing on a single stalk; ²³but right behind them sprouted seven ears, shriveled, thin, and scorched by the east wind. ²⁴And the thin ears swallowed the seven healthy ears. I have told my magicians, but none has an explanation for me.”

²⁵And Joseph said to Pharaoh, “Pharaoh’s dreams are one and the same: God has told Pharaoh what He is about to do. ²⁶The seven healthy cows are seven years, and the seven healthy ears are seven years; it is the same dream. ²⁷The 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. ²⁸It is just as I have told Pharaoh: God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do. ²⁹Immediately ahead are seven years of great abundance in all the land of Egypt. ³⁰After 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, ³¹no trace of the abundance will be left in the land because of the famine thereafter, for it will be very severe. ³²As 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.

³³“Accordingly, let Pharaoh find a man of

שָׂבָלִים עֲלֵת בְּקִנְיָה אֶחָד מֵלֶאֱת וְטֹבוֹת: ²³וְהִנֵּה שִׁבְעַ שְׂבָלִים צִנְמוֹת דִּקּוֹת שְׂדֵפוֹת קָדִים צִמְחוֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶם: ²⁴וְתִבְלַעַן הַשְּׂבָלִים הַדִּקָּת אֶת שִׁבְעַ הַשְּׂבָלִים הַטֹּבוֹת וְאָמַר אֶל־הַחֲרָטָמִים וְאֵין מֵגִיד לִי:

²⁵וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־פַּרְעֹה חֲלוֹם פְּרָעָה אֶחָד הוּא אֶת אֲשֶׁר הָאֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה הַגִּיד לְפַרְעֹה: ²⁶שִׁבְעַ פָּרִת הַטֹּבֹת שִׁבְעַ שָׁנִים הִנֵּה וְשִׁבְעַ הַשְּׂבָלִים הַטֹּבֹת שִׁבְעַ שָׁנִים הִנֵּה חֲלוֹם אֶחָד הוּא: ²⁷וְשִׁבְעַ הַפְּרוֹת הָרָקוֹת וְהָרַעַת הָעֲלֵת אַחֲרֵיהֶן שִׁבְעַ שָׁנִים הִנֵּה וְשִׁבְעַ הַשְּׂבָלִים הָרָקוֹת שְׂדֵפוֹת הַקָּדִים יִהְיוּ שִׁבְעַ שָׁנֵי רָעָב: ²⁸הוּא הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי אֶל־פַּרְעֹה אֲשֶׁר הָאֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה הָרָאָה אֶת־פְּרָעָה: ²⁹הִנֵּה שִׁבְעַ שָׁנִים בָּאוֹת שִׁבְעַ גְּדוֹל בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: ³⁰וְקָמוּ שִׁבְעַ שָׁנֵי רָעָב אַחֲרֵיהֶן וְנִשְׁכַּח כָּל־הַשִּׁבְעַ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם וְכָל־הָרָעָב אֶת־הָאֶרֶץ: ³¹וְלֹא־יִוָּדַע הַשִּׁבְעַ בְּאֶרֶץ מִפְּנֵי הָרָעָב הַהוּא אַחֲרֵיכֶן כִּי־כָבֵד הוּא מְאֹד: ³²וְעַל־הַשָּׁנוֹת הַחֲלוֹם אֶל־פַּרְעֹה פַּעַמִּים כִּי־נִכּוֹן הַדָּבָר מֵעַם הָאֱלֹהִים וּמִמֶּהָרָה הָאֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ:

³³וְעַתָּה יֵרָא פְּרָעָה אִישׁ נָבוֹן וְחָכָם

24. none has an explanation The phrase refers to what was related in verses 8 and 15.

25. one and the same Both dreams, though separate and successive, constitute a single whole and express the identical phenomenon.

has told That is, “has disclosed.”

31. no trace The reserves of food set aside for the famine will be used up completely.

32. determined It is established beyond doubt.

soon The seven-year cycle begins at once.

JOSEPH’S ADVICE (vv. 33–36)

Unsolicited by Pharaoh, Joseph offers advice on how to avert the famine.

33. Accordingly Joseph presents his advice

33. Joseph’s interpretation strikes Pharaoh as valid because its message of impending disaster seems to fit the mood of the dream and

because he not only interprets the dream but gives Pharaoh advice on how to deal with its message.

discernment and wisdom, and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴And let Pharaoh take steps to appoint overseers over the land, and organize the land of Egypt in the seven years of plenty. ³⁵Let all the food 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 the cities. ³⁶Let 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."

³⁷The plan pleased Pharaoh and all his courtiers. ³⁸And Pharaoh said to his courtiers, "Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?" ³⁹So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is none so discerning and wise as you. ⁴⁰You 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." ⁴¹Pharaoh further said to Joseph, "See, I put you in charge of all the land of Egypt." ⁴²And removing his signet ring from

וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶהוּ עַל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ³⁴יַעֲשֶׂה פֶרְעָה וַיִּפְקֹד פְּקָדִים עַל-הָאָרֶץ וַחֲמִשׁ אֶת-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּשֶׁבַע שָׁנֵי הַשָּׁבַע: ³⁵וַיִּקְבְּצוּ אֶת-כָּל-אֹכֶל הַשָּׁנִים הַטֹּבֹת הַבָּאֹת הָאֵלֶּה וַיַּצְבְּרוּ בָר תַּחַת יָד-פֶרְעָה אֹכֶל בְּעָרִים וְשָׁמְרוּ: ³⁶וְהָיָה הָאֹכֶל לִפְקֻדֹן לָאָרֶץ לְשֶׁבַע שָׁנֵי הָרָעָב אֲשֶׁר תֵּהְיֶינָה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְלֹא-תִכָּרֵת הָאָרֶץ בְּרָעָב:

³⁷וַיִּיטֹב הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי פֶרְעָה וּבְעֵינֵי כָל-עַבְדָּיו: ³⁸וַיֹּאמֶר פֶּרְעָה אֶל-עַבְדָּיו הֲנִמְצָא כָזֶה אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ: ³⁹וַיֹּאמֶר פֶּרְעָה אֶל-יוֹסֵף אַחֲרֵי הוֹדִיעַ אֱלֹהִים אוֹתָךְ אֶת-כָּל-זֹאת אֵין-נִבֹן וְחָכָם כְּמוֹךָ: ⁴⁰אֵתָּה תִּהְיֶה עַל-בֵּיתִי וְעַל-פִּיךָ יִשָּׁק כָּל-עַמִּי רַק הַכֶּסֶף אֶגְדֹּל מִמֶּךָ: ⁴¹וַיֹּאמֶר פֶּרְעָה אֶל-יוֹסֵף רְאֵה נָתַתִּי אֹתְךָ עַל כָּל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ⁴²וַיֹּסֶר פֶּרְעָה אֶת-טַבַּעְתּוֹ מֵעַל יָדוֹ וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ

not as part of the dream message but as a personal suggestion.

34. let Pharaoh Not wishing to raise any suspicion that he is suggesting the creation of a new focus of power, Joseph repeatedly emphasizes "Pharaoh," thereby stressing the ubiquitous, omniscient, and omnipotent nature of the king in ancient Egypt.

35. good years Joseph sensibly suggests that grain be stockpiled during the plentiful years against the forthcoming years of famine.

JOSEPH'S APPOINTMENT AS VIZIER (vv. 37–46)

37. The plan pleased Pharaoh Pharaoh and his courtiers are impressed by Joseph's perception that the two dreams are actually one, by his relating them to national affairs rather than to the king's personal interests, and by the social concern that he displays in his advice.

38. Could we find Pharaoh's question to his courtiers is rhetorical. He knows at once what he must do.

in whom is the spirit of God This is the

first biblical mention of an individual so endowed. Possession of the "spirit of God" impels one to undertake a mission (Num. 27:18), imparts extraordinary energy and drive (Judg. 3:10, 11:29), and produces uncommon intelligence and practical wisdom.

39. discerning and wise Pharaoh repeats Joseph's own words (v. 33).

40. in charge of my court This function probably refers to the position of "overseer of the domain of the palace," one of the known Egyptian bureaucratic titles. Most likely, Joseph is given control over the king's personal estates.

41. Pharaoh further said Joseph does not utter a word in response to Pharaoh's announcement.

in charge of all the land The function reflects the Egyptian title "chief of the entire land."

42. removing Pharaoh now performs a series of ceremonial acts that confirm Joseph's position as "grand vizier of Egypt."

signet ring The transfer of the ring bearing the royal seal from the finger of Pharaoh to that of Joseph signifies the delegation of authority; it

his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; and he had him dressed in robes of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck.⁴³ He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command, and they cried before him, "Abrek!" Thus he placed him over all the land of Egypt.

⁴⁴Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh; yet without you, no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." ⁴⁵Pharaoh then gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him for a wife Asenath daughter of Poti-pha, priest of On. Thus Joseph emerged in

על־יֶד יוֹסֵף וַיִּלְבֹּשׁ אֹתוֹ בְּגָדֵי־שֵׁשׁ וַיַּסֵּם
רֶבֶד הַזֶּהָב עַל־צוּאָרָיו: ⁴³וַיַּרְכֵּב אֹתוֹ
בְּמֶרְכָּבַת הַמִּשְׁנָה אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וַיִּקְרְאוּ
לִפְנֵי אֲבִירָה וַנִּתֵּן אֹתוֹ עַל כָּל־אֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם:

⁴⁴וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף אֲנִי פַרְעֹה
וּבִלְעֲדֶיךָ לֹא־יָרִים אִישׁ אֶת־יָדוֹ וְאֶת־
רַגְלוֹ בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ⁴⁵וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה
שֵׁם־יוֹסֵף צָפְנַת פַּעֲנָח וַיִּתֵּן־לוֹ אֶת־אֲסֵנַת
בַּת־פּוֹטִי פַרַע כַּהֵן אֵן לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּצֵא יוֹסֵף

enables the new official to validate documents in the king's name. The title "royal seal bearer" was well known in ancient Egypt.

fine linen The term translated as "fine linen" (*shesh*) is an Egyptian loan word for cloth of exceptional quality.

a gold chain The giving of a gold chain was one of the highest distinctions the king could bestow upon his favorites.

43. chariot This is the first reference to a chariot in the Bible. The Hyksos invasion of Egypt in the 18th century B.C.E. introduced the chariot to that country as an instrument of warfare.

second-in-command That is, viceroy.

they cried before him The practice of having heralds declaim in front of the chariot rider is recorded in Esther 6:9.

Abrek! An exclamation found nowhere else in the Bible. In Akkadian, *abarakku* is the term for a steward of the temple and the chief steward of a private or royal household.

44. I am Pharaoh That is, I speak with the full authority of my royal office.

lift up hand or foot A figure of speech meaning "no action shall be taken."

45. gave Joseph the name The change of name signifies a new identity and a fresh start in life. The king probably wanted to "Egyptianize" the name Joseph.

Zaphenath-paneah The Egyptian words mean "God speaks; he lives," or "the creator/sustainer of life." During this period in Egypt, it was not unusual for foreigners, and Semites in particular, to be welcomed by the court and to rise to positions of responsibility and power in the government.

Asenath The Egyptian name means "she who belongs to (the goddess) Neith."

Poti-pha See Comment to 37:36.

priest of On This city, located seven miles northeast of modern Cairo, was the worship center of the sun god Re. It was called Beit She-mesh in Hebrew (Jer. 43:13) and Heliopolis in

45. Is Poti-pha identical with Potiphar, whom Joseph served in chapter 39? The Talmud thinks he is and understands his giving his daughter to Joseph in marriage as an acknowledgment that Joseph was innocent of the charge brought against him (BT Sot. 13b).

A Rabbinic legend identifies Asenath as the daughter who was born to Dinah, Jacob's daughter, after she had been violated by Shechem (Gen. 34). Subsequently, she was adopted by the childless Potiphar. Thus Joseph, like the other Patriarchs, marries a relative.

HALAKHAH L'MA-ASEH

41:45 the name This is the first instance in Jewish tradition of having more than one name, one of them Hebrew. For purposes of religious honors (such as an *aliyah* to the Torah) and religious documents (such as for marriage and divorce), one is identified by one's Hebrew name, the son or daughter of (*ben* or *bat*) one's father's Hebrew name. In prayers for the ill, one is traditionally identified by one's mother's name. Conservative practice increasingly uses both the mother's and father's Hebrew names in all circumstances, as an expression of honoring both parents in accordance with the Decalogue (see Exod. 20:12).

charge of the land of Egypt.—⁴⁶Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt.—Leaving Pharaoh's presence, Joseph traveled through all the land of Egypt.

⁴⁷During the seven years of plenty, the land produced in abundance. ⁴⁸And he gathered all the grain of the seven years that the land of Egypt was enjoying, and stored the grain in the cities; he put in each city the grain of the fields around it. ⁴⁹So Joseph collected produce in very large quantity, like the sands of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured.

⁵⁰Before the years of famine came, Joseph became the father of two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Poti-phares, priest of On, bore to him. ⁵¹Joseph named the first-born Manasseh,

עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ⁴⁶וַיֹּסֶף בֶּן־שְׁלֹשִׁים
שָׁנָה בָּעָמְדוֹ לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ־מִצְרַיִם
וַיֵּצֵא יוֹסֵף מִלִּפְנֵי פַרְעֹה וַיַּעֲבֹר בְּכָל־
אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

⁴⁷וַתַּעַשׂ הָאָרֶץ בְּשִׁבַּע שָׁנֵי הַשָּׁבַע
לְקִמְצִים: ⁴⁸וַיִּקְבֹּץ אֶת־כָּל־אֶכָּל ׀ שִׁבַּע
שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ בָּאָרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּתֵּן־אֶכָּל
בְּעָרִים אֶכָּל שְׂדֵה־הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתֶיהָ
נָתַן בְּתוֹכָהּ: ⁴⁹וַיַּצְבֹּר יוֹסֵף בָּר כְּחוֹל הַיָּם
הָרַבָּה מֵאֹד עַד כִּי־חָדַל לִסְפֹּר כִּי־אֵין
מִסְפָּר:

⁵⁰וַלְיוֹסֵף יֵלֶד שְׁנֵי בָנִים בְּטָרֶם תָּבוֹא
שְׁנַת הָרָעָב אֲשֶׁר יִלְדֶה־לוֹ אֲסֵנַת בַּת־
פּוֹטִי פַרַע כְּהֵן אֹהֵן: ⁵¹וַיִּקְרָא יוֹסֵף אֶת־

Greek. The high priest at On held the title “greatest of seers.” Joseph thus marries into clerical nobility. Moses would later do the same.

emerged in charge of Literally, “went out over.” The clause probably should be understood as short for “he left Pharaoh's presence to be in charge of the land of Egypt.”

46. Joseph was thirty This note, given at the time Joseph's ordeals end, corresponds to the recording of his age as 17 when they began (37:2) and provides a framework for the narrative.

entered the service of Literally, “stood before.”

Joseph traveled Joseph begins to familiarize himself with local conditions to prepare for the task of enabling the Egyptians to survive the expected famine.

THE SEVEN YEARS OF PLENTY (vv. 47–49)

47. in abundance The word translated as

“in abundance” (*likmatzim*) means, literally, “by handfuls,” i.e., “bumper crops.”

48. he gathered all the grain From Joseph's activities it is clear that he holds the well-known Egyptian office of “overseer of the granaries of Upper and Lower Egypt,” whose duties included the collection of tax payments on field produce, the storage of an adequate supply of food in years of plenty, and the distribution of food during years of famine. He was, in effect, minister of agriculture.

JOSEPH'S TWO SONS (vv. 50–52)

50. years Literally, “year.” The sons were born either before the first year of the famine or before the year when its effect first became severe—i.e., toward the end of the famine's second year, when the migration of Jacob and his family took place.

51. Manasseh Joseph adapts the name,

50. Before the years of famine came Once the famine arrived, however, people stopped having children, so as not to have additional mouths to feed (BT Ta-an. 11a).

51. By calling his first son Manasseh, Joseph

is not saying that he has forgotten the circumstances of his coming to Egypt. He is saying that he remembers them but that the memory no longer oppresses him.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

41:51 Joseph named the first-born See Comment to Gen. 29:32.

meaning, “God has made me forget completely my hardship and my parental home.”⁵² And the second he named Ephraim, meaning, “God has made me fertile in the land of my affliction.”

⁵³The seven years of abundance that the land of Egypt enjoyed came to an end, ⁵⁴and the seven years of famine set in, just as Joseph had foretold. There was famine in all lands, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. ⁵⁵And when all the land of Egypt felt the hunger, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph; whatever he tells you, you shall do.”—⁵⁶Accordingly, when the famine became severe in the land of Egypt, Joseph laid open all that was within, and rationed out grain to the Egyptians. The famine, however, spread over the whole world. ⁵⁷So all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to procure rations, for the famine had become severe throughout the world.

which means “he who causes to forget,” to his own situation.

meaning Hebrew: *ki*, “because.”

my hardship and my parental home This is an instance of a single idea expressed by two terms. It means, “my suffering in my parental home.”

52. Ephraim The name must have meant either “fertile land,” from the stem פרה, or “pastureland,” from *afar*. Either meaning would suitably describe the future territory of the tribe bearing this name, which was located in the central region of the Land of Israel and blessed with good soil and rainfall.

made me fertile The Hebrew verb *hifrani*, a wordplay on the name Ephraim, refers to the blessing of abundant descendants.

the land of my affliction That is, where I spent 13 years in captivity.

THE ONSET OF FAMINE (vv. 53–57)

The entire agricultural economy of Lower Egypt, the northern, virtually rainless area of the country, has always depended on the Nile floods caused by the river’s periodic rise during three summer months. There are years when the rains in the southern Sudan are insufficient. A

שם הַבְּכוֹר מִנִּשְׁחָה כִּי־נִשְׁכַּח אֱלֹהִים אֶת־
כָּל־עֲמָלִי וְאֶת כָּל־בֵּית אָבִי: ⁵²וְאֵת שֵׁם
הַשֵּׁנִי קָרָא אֶפְרַיִם כִּי־הַפְּרִנִּי אֱלֹהִים
בְּאֶרֶץ עֲנִי:

רביעי ⁵³וַתִּבְלִינָה שְׁבַע שָׁנֵי הַשְּׁבַע אֲשֶׁר הָיָה
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ⁵⁴וַתִּחַלְלִינָה שְׁבַע שָׁנֵי
הָרָעָב לָבוֹא בְּאֶשֶׁר אָמַר יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי רָעָב
בְּכָל־הָאֲרָצוֹת וּבְכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הָיָה
לֶחֶם: ⁵⁵וַתִּרָּעַב כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּצְעַק
הָעָם אֶל־פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה
לְכָל־מִצְרַיִם לָכֹן אֶל־יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר־יֹאמַר
לָכֶם תַּעֲשׂוּ: ⁵⁶וַהֲרָעַב הָיָה עַל כָּל־פְּנֵי
הָאֲרֶץ וַיִּפְתָּח יוֹסֵף אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם
וַיֵּשְׁבֶר לְמִצְרַיִם וַיַּחֲזֶק הָרָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם: ⁵⁷וְכָל־הָאֲרֶץ בָּאוּ מִצְרַיִם
לְשֹׁבֶר אֶל־יוֹסֵף כִּי־חָזַק הָרָעַב בְּכָל־
הָאֲרֶץ:

shortfall of only a few inches could bring famine to Egypt. This phenomenon and the motif of seven-year famines are well documented in Egyptian and other Near Eastern texts.

54. in all lands In actuality, there could not be any natural connection between the famine in Egypt and that in neighboring countries. The situation in Canaan resulted from a prolonged lack of rainfall that had nothing to do with the failure of the Nile to rise.

55. Go to Joseph This verse, which anticipates the next episode, explains why the brothers have to appear in person before Joseph (v. 57).

56. Accordingly For the sake of clarity and for continuity with verse 55, the translation inverts the order of the Hebrew clauses.

within The Hebrew word *ba-hem*, literally, “in them,” has no antecedent. The ancient versions variously rendered “all the granaries,” “all the granaries in which was grain,” and “everything in which was grain.” These either reflect a different text or are attempts to interpret the difficult Hebrew.

over the whole world Literally, “over all the face of the land.”

42 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? ²Now 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.” ³So ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to get grain rations in Egypt; ⁴for Jacob did not send Joseph’s brother Benjamin with his brothers, since he feared that he might meet with disaster. ⁵Thus the sons of Israel were among those who came to procure rations, for the famine extended to the land of Canaan.

⁶Now Joseph was the vizier of the land; it was

מב וַיֵּרָא יַעֲקֹב כִּי יֵשׁ-שָׁבֶר בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב לְבָנָיו לָמָּה תִּתְרָאוּ: ²וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה שָׁמַעְתִּי כִּי יֵשׁ-שָׁבֶר בְּמִצְרַיִם רְדוּ-שָׁמָּה וּשְׁבֵרוּ-לָנוּ מִשֵּׁם וְנָחִיָּה וְלֹא נָמוּת: ³וַיֵּרְדוּ אַחֲי-יֹסֵף עִשְׂרֵה לְשָׁבֶר בָּר מִמִּצְרַיִם: ⁴וְאֶת-בְּנִימִן אַחִי יֹסֵף לֹא-שָׁלַח יַעֲקֹב אֶת-אֶחָיו כִּי אָמַר פֶּן-יִקְרָאנוּ אֶסּוֹן: ⁵וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְשָׁבֶר בְּתוֹךְ הַבָּאִים כִּי-הָיָה הָרָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: ⁶וַיֹּסֵף הוּא הַשְּׁלִיט עַל-הָאָרֶץ הוּא

JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS—ONCE AGAIN (42:1–38)

Joseph, having reached a time in his life when he no longer wishes to be reminded of his past, suddenly finds himself once again face to face with his brothers.

THE BROTHERS’ JOURNEY TO EGYPT (vv. 1–5)

1. saw More than 20 years have passed since we last observed Jacob as an inconsolable father mourning his lost son. Now we see him noticing his countrymen as they return from Egypt laden with supplies.

looking at one another Helplessly, inactive.

2. Go down and procure rations The old Patriarch once again exercises authority and initiative in a critical situation.

3. ten of Joseph’s brothers Not “Joseph’s 10 brothers,” because there were 11 in all. The rations in Egypt must have been available on a limited per capita basis, so that the presence and services of all 10 were needed to purchase and

transport sufficient supplies for their large households. Reasons of security may also have dictated the need to travel as a convoy on the journey, which lasted one week each way.

4. Joseph’s brother Benjamin The description explains the special status of Benjamin, Joseph’s full brother, who has replaced Joseph as his father’s favorite (Gen. 44:20).

meet with disaster Benjamin’s mother, Rachel—as well as his brother—had encountered misfortune during a journey.

5. among those who came They were just one among many such groups who came from neighboring countries—yet they alone attract attention.

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH JOSEPH (vv. 6–17)

6. vizier This title of Joseph’s, in addition to “seller of corn,” explains in what capacity he interrogated and accused the brothers. A man

CHAPTER 42

1. The availability of food in Egypt sets in motion a series of events that will bring Joseph’s family to Egypt, where they will be reunited with him. There they will prosper at first, before being reduced to slavery.

5. sons of Israel This is a turning point—the first time that Jacob’s sons are referred to

as *b’nei Yisra-el*. In Exodus, the same term comes to mean “Israelites” (see Exod. 1:7,9).

6ff. The purpose of Joseph’s elaborate ruse is not to torment or embarrass his brothers but to see whether they indeed had changed. Repentance (*t’shuvah*) is more than regret. It includes finding oneself in a similar situation and responding differently. Joseph needs to know whether the brothers will leave Simeon and/or

he who dispensed rations to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed low to him, with their faces to the ground. ⁷When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them; but 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." ⁸For though Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. ⁹Recalling 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." ¹⁰But they said to him, "No, my lord! Truly, your servants have come to procure food. ¹¹We are all of us sons of the same man; we are honest men; your servants have never been spies!" ¹²And he said to them, "No, you have come to see the land in its nakedness!" ¹³And they replied, "We your servants were twelve brothers, sons of a certain man in the land of

הַמִּשְׁפָּר לְכָל־עַם הָאָרֶץ וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶחָי
יוֹסֵף וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ־לּוֹ אַפָּיִם אֶרְצָה: ⁷וַיֵּרָא
יוֹסֵף אֶת־אֶחָיו וַיִּכְרֶם וַיַּתְנִיחַ אֲלֵיהֶם
וַיְדַבֵּר אֲתָם קָשׁוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מֵאֵין
בָּאתֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן לְשִׁבְר־
אֶכָּל: ⁸וַיִּכְּר יוֹסֵף אֶת־אֶחָיו וְהֵם לֹא
הִכְרָהוּ: ⁹וַיִּזְכֹּר יוֹסֵף אֶת הַחֲלֻמוֹת
אֲשֶׁר חָלֵם לָהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מְרֹגְלִים
אַתֶּם לְרֹאוֹת אֶת־עֵרֹת הָאָרֶץ בָּאתֶם:
¹⁰וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו לֹא אֲדֹנִי וְעַבְדֶּיךָ בָּאוּ
לְשִׁבְר־אֶכָּל: ¹¹כֻּלָּנוּ בְּנֵי אִישׁ־אֶחָד נַחֲנוּ
בְּנִים אֲנַחְנוּ לֹא־הָיוּ עַבְדֶּיךָ מְרֹגְלִים:
¹²וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם לֹא כִי־עֵרֹת הָאָרֶץ
בָּאתֶם לְרֹאוֹת: ¹³וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר
עַבְדֶּיךָ אַחִים | אֲנַחְנוּ בְּנֵי אִישׁ־אֶחָד

who was solely the dispenser of rations would not normally be concerned with matters of state security.

bowed low Joseph's boyhood dreams (Gen. 37:7,9ff.) are being fulfilled.

7. he acted like a stranger toward them The Hebrew may also be translated, "he hid his identity from them." Joseph schemes against the former schemers.

to procure food To each question the brothers respond with unsolicited information.

8. Joseph recognized The repetition of this fact is simply due to the stylistic need for a counterbalance to the new fact: "they did not recognize him."

they did not recognize him It has been more than two decades since they last saw Joseph. He has developed into mature manhood. In addition, his language, his dress, his position, and his name have become Egyptianized.

9. Recalling the dreams The sight of his

brothers prostrating themselves before him suddenly reminds Joseph of those long-forgotten dreams, and he realizes that they actually had presaged his future. At the same time, recalling how deeply his brothers hated him, he feels that he must find out conclusively whether or not they regret their actions.

You are spies They were foreigners who had entered Egypt from the northeast, the land's most vulnerable border. Incursions by Asians coming from Canaan were fairly common. The discovery of spies might herald an imminent attack.

the land in its nakedness This figure of speech refers to uncovering any hidden weaknesses in Egypt's fortifications.

11. We are all of us We are one family unit and would not jeopardize all of our lives by collectively engaging in such a dangerous occupation.

Benjamin to languish in prison, as they once had abandoned him.

11. we are all of us sons of the same man

They spoke the truth to their brother Joseph without realizing it: "You and we have the same father" (Gen. R. 91:7).

Canaan; the youngest, however, is now with our father, and one is no more.”¹⁴ But Joseph said to them, “It is just as I have told you: You are spies! ¹⁵By this you shall be put to the test: unless your youngest brother comes here, by Pharaoh, you shall not depart from this place! ¹⁶Let 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!” ¹⁷And he confined them in the guardhouse for three days.

¹⁸On the third day Joseph said to them, “Do this and you shall live, for I am a God-fearing man. ¹⁹If 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; ²⁰but you must bring me your youngest brother, that your words may be verified and that you may not die.” And they did accordingly. ²¹They said to one another, “Alas, we are being punished on

בְּאֶרֶץ פְּנֵעַן וְהִנֵּה הֶקְטָן אֶת־אֲבִינוּ הַיּוֹם וְהָאֶחָד אֵינָנוּ: ¹⁴וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲלֵכֶם לֵאמֹר מְרַגְלִים אַתֶּם: ¹⁵בְּזֹאת תִּבְחָנוּ חַי פְּרַעֲה אִם־תַּצְאוּ מִזֶּה בִּי אִם־בָּבוֹא אֲחִיכֶם הֶקְטָן הִנֵּה: ¹⁶שְׁלְחוּ מִכֶּם אֶחָד וַיִּקַּח אֶת־אֲחִיכֶם וְאַתֶּם הֶאֱסְרוּ וַיִּבְחָנוּ דְּבָרֵיכֶם הָאֵמֶת אִתְּכֶם וְאִם־לֹא חַי פְּרַעֲה בִּי מְרַגְלִים אַתֶּם: ¹⁷וַיֹּאסֶף אֹתָם אֶל־מִשְׁמַר שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים:

¹⁸וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי זֹאת עֲשׂוּ וְחַיּוּ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים אֲנִי יִרְאָ: ¹⁹אִם־כִּנִּים אַתֶּם אֲחִיכֶם אֶחָד יֵאָסֶר בְּבֵית מִשְׁמָרְכֶם וְאַתֶּם לָכוּ הִבִּיאוּ שָׁבֵר רַעֲבֹן בְּתֵיכֶם: ²⁰וְאֶת־אֲחִיכֶם הֶקְטָן תִּבְיֵאוּ אֵלַי וַיֹּאמְרוּ דְּבָרֵיכֶם וְלֹא תָמוּתוּ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן: ²¹וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו אֲבָל־

חמישי

13. one is no more The phrasing either reflects their uncertainty as to Joseph’s fate or is a delicate way of saying that he was dead.

14. It is just as I have told you In a show of despotic arbitrariness, Joseph imperiously rejects their defense. The burden of disproof is on the brothers.

15. by Pharaoh Literally, “the life of Pharaoh.” This phrase gives the following statement the character of an oath, validated and sanctioned by the awesome power of the king. It was common practice in the ancient world to swear by the life of the king. Israelites also swore by God.

16. Let one of you go This is the first of the tests Joseph imposes. How would they endure the strain of imprisonment? What rivalries would surface as a result of their awareness that only one would return to Canaan and that the fate of the others depended on that one?

THE SECOND ENCOUNTER WITH JOSEPH (vv. 18–26)

18. On the third day Had Joseph intended only a three-day imprisonment, or does he now change his mind? If the latter, then he must have become aware of the terrible, perhaps fatal suffering that he would be inflicting on his father by detaining nine of the brothers. Furthermore, how would the starving families back home obtain food?

a God-fearing man Fear of God is the ultimate restraint on treachery.

20. that you may not die Joseph has forced the brothers into a situation in which they have no choice but to bring Benjamin to avoid dying of hunger.

And they did accordingly They agreed to Joseph’s conditions.

21. we are being punished The word

21. we are being punished on account of our brother There was no logical reason for them

to connect their predicament with what they had done to Joseph so many years earlier. Ap-

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.” ²²Then 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.” ²³They did not know that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between him and them. ²⁴He turned away from them and wept. But he came back to them and spoke to them; and he took Simeon from among them and had him bound before their eyes. ²⁵Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, return each one’s money to his sack, and give them provisions for the journey; and this was done for them. ²⁶So they loaded their asses with the rations and departed from there.

²⁷As one of them was opening his sack to give feed to his ass at the night encampment, he saw his money right there at the mouth of his bag. ²⁸And he said to his brothers, “My money has been returned! It is here in my bag!” Their

אֲשֶׁמִים | אֲנַחְנוּ עַל-אֶחָיו אֲשֶׁר רָאִינוּ
צָרָת נַפְשׁוֹ בְּהִתְחַנְּנוּ אֵלָינוּ וְלֹא שָׁמַעְנוּ
עַל-כֵּן בָּאָה אֵלָינוּ הַצָּרָה הַזֹּאת: ²² וַיַּעַן
רְאוּבֵן אֹתָם לֵאמֹר הֲלוֹא אֶמְרָתִי
אֵלֵיכֶם | לֵאמֹר אֶל-תַּחֲטְאוּ בְיָלֶד וְלֹא
שָׁמַעְתֶּם וְגַם-דָּמּוֹ הִנֵּה נִדְרָשׁ: ²³ וְהֵם
לֹא יָדְעוּ כִּי שָׁמַע יוֹסֵף כִּי הַמְלִיץ
בֵּינֵהֶם: ²⁴ וַיֵּסֶב מֵעֲלֵיהֶם וַיִּבֶךְ וַיָּשָׁב
אֲלֵהֶם וַיְדַבֵּר אֲלֵהֶם וַיִּקַּח מֵאִתָּם אֶת-
שִׁמְעוֹן וַיִּאָּסֶר אֹתוֹ לְעֵינֵיהֶם: ²⁵ וַיַּצֵּו
יוֹסֵף וַיִּמְלְאוּ אֶת-כָּלֵיהֶם בָּרֶ וְלִהְשִׁיב
בְּסִפֵּיהֶם אִישׁ אֶל-שָׁקוֹ וְלָתֵת לָהֶם צֹדָה
לְדֶרֶךְ וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם כֵּן: ²⁶ וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת-
שִׁבְרָם עַל-חֲמִירֵיהֶם וַיֵּלְכוּ מִשָּׁם:
²⁷ וַיִּפְתָּח הָאָחִיד אֶת-שָׁקוֹ לָתֵת מִסְפּוֹא
לְחִמּוֹ בַּמָּלֹךְ וַיִּרְא אֶת-כֶּסֶפוֹ וְהִנֵּה-
הוּא בְּפִי אִמְתָּתוֹ: ²⁸ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-אֶחָיו
הַיּוֹשֵׁב בְּסִפִּי וְגַם הִנֵּה בְּאִמְתָּתִי וַיֵּצֵא

ashem (the singular of the adjective *ashemim*, translated as “we are being punished”) can mean both guilt and its consequent punishment (Ps. 34:22), for the two are inseparable in Israelite thought. In this moment of common adversity, the brothers’ tortured consciences suddenly erupt.

22. the reckoning for his blood Reuben had warned his brothers (37:22), “Shed no blood!” Apparently, he thinks Joseph is dead.

23. an interpreter This is the only instance in the patriarchal narratives when direct communication is impeded by differences in language.

24. and wept Joseph is deeply affected by the genuine contrition he hears in the words of his brothers, but for the present he must conceal his emotions.

Simeon Having overheard that Reuben, the eldest, tried to save his life, Joseph selects the next in seniority to be detained.

before their eyes To show that his threats were to be taken seriously and to test their solidarity.

25. each one’s money Did Joseph mean to test their integrity or to intensify their torment? His motive is unclear.

THE RETURN TO CANAAN (vv. 27–38)

27. night encampment Pastoral nomads did not lodge in inns but in crude tent encampments.

bag The bag or pack was inside a sack.

28. Their hearts sank The surprising find arouses their apprehension. They know they

parently, they had been burdened by guilt for all those years.

24. He turned away from them and wept For 20 years, Joseph had dreamed of getting

even with his brothers. Now that he has that power, now that his youthful dream of having them bow to him has come true, Joseph realizes that he does not really want revenge. He wants

hearts sank; and, trembling, they turned to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

²⁹When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had befallen them, saying, ³⁰"The man who is lord of the land spoke harshly to us and accused us of spying on the land. ³¹We said to him, 'We are honest men; we have never been spies! ³²There were twelve of us brothers, sons by the same father; but one is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in the land of Canaan.' ³³But the man who is lord of the land said to us, 'By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, and take something for your starving households and be off. ³⁴And 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.'"

³⁵As they were emptying their sacks, there, in each one's sack, was his money-bag! When they and their father saw their money-bags, they were dismayed. ³⁶Their 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

must return to Egypt for further supplies and the release of their brother.

What is this The words convey their sense of helplessness.

29. When they came to their father The brothers tell their father only what is minimally necessary to explain Simeon's absence and to emphasize the importance of sending Benjamin next time. They say nothing of the three days in detention, of the shackling of Simeon, or of finding the money.

his family back. Revenge is almost always sweeter in the contemplation than in the realization.

לָבָם וַיִּחַרְדּוּ אִישׁ אֶל-אָחִיו לֵאמֹר מַה-
זֹאת עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים לָנוּ:

²⁹וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן
וַיַּגִּידוּ לוֹ אֶת כָּל-הַקֶּרֶת אֲתָם לֵאמֹר:
³⁰דָּבַר הָאִישׁ אֲדֹנֵי הָאָרֶץ אֶתָּנוּ קָשׁוֹת
וַיִּתֵּן אֶתָּנוּ כְּמִרְגָּלִים אֶת-הָאָרֶץ:
³¹וַנֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בְּנִים אֲנַחְנוּ לֹא הֵינּוּ
מִרְגָּלִים: ³²שְׁנַיִם-עָשָׂר אֲנַחְנוּ אֲחִים בְּנֵי
אָבִינוּ הָאֶחָד אֵינָנוּ וְהַקֶּטָן הַיּוֹם אֶת-
אָבִינוּ בָּאָרֶץ כְּנָעַן: ³³וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֵינוּ
הָאִישׁ אֲדֹנֵי הָאָרֶץ בְּזֹאת אֵדַע כִּי כְנָעִים
אַתֶּם אֲחֵיכֶם הָאֶחָד הַנִּיחָו אִתִּי וְאֶת-
רַעְבוֹן בְּתֵיכֶם קָחוּ וּלְכוּ: ³⁴וְהָבִיאוּ אֶת-
אֲחֵיכֶם הַקָּטָן אֵלַי וְאֵדָעָה כִּי לֹא מִרְגָּלִים
אַתֶּם כִּי כְנָעִים אַתֶּם אֶת-אֲחֵיכֶם אֶתָּן
לָכֶם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ תִּסְחָרוּ:

³⁵וַיְהִי הֵם מְרִיקִים שְׂקֵיהֶם וְהִנֵּה-אִישׁ
צִרֹר-כֶּסֶף בְּשָׁקוֹ וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶת-צִרְרוֹת
כֶּסְפֵיהֶם הֵמָּה וַאֲבִיהֶם וַיִּירָאוּ:
³⁶וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם אִתִּי
שָׁכַלְתֶּם יוֹסֵף אֵינָנוּ וְשִׁמְעוֹן אֵינָנוּ וְאֶת-

33. and take something for your starving households Literally, "and take the starvation of your households."

35. they were dismayed The brothers must have dipped into their packs for food during the return journey; each discovered his money long before they reached Canaan.

36. It is always me that you bereave Jacob, crushed with sorrow, laments, "It is I who suffer; it is my sons who disappear!"

36. It is always me that you bereave Does Jacob suspect that they were responsible for Joseph's disappearance (Sforno)?

things always happen to me!” ³⁷Then 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.” ³⁸But 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.”

43 But the famine in the land was severe. ²And 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.” ³But Judah said to him, “The man warned us, ‘Do not let me see your faces unless your brother is with you.’ ⁴If you will let our brother go with us, we will go down and procure food for you; ⁵but 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.’” ⁶And Israel said, “Why did you serve me so ill as to tell the man that you had another brother?” ⁷They replied, “But the man kept

בְּנֵימָן תִּקְחוּ עָלַי הֲיִו כְּלָנָה: ³⁷וַיֹּאמֶר רְאוּבֵן אֶל־אָבִיו לֵאמֹר אֶת־שְׁנֵי בְנֵי תַמָּית אִם־לֹא אָבִיאָנוּ אֵלֶיךָ הַנָּה אֲתוֹ עַל־יָדֵי וְאֲנִי אֲשִׁיבָנוּ אֵלֶיךָ: ³⁸וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא־יֵרֵד בְּנִי עִמָּכֶם כִּי־אָחִיו מָתָּה וְהוּא לְבָדוֹ נִשְׁאָר וּקְרָאָהוּ אֶסּוֹן בְּדֶרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר תֵּלְכוּ־בָּהּ וְהוֹרַדְתֶּם אֶת־שִׁיבְתִּי בִּיגּוֹן שְׂאוּלָה:

מג וְהָרָעַב כָּבֵד בְּאֶרֶץ: ²וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר כָּלוּ לֶאֱכֹל אֶת־הַשֶּׁבֶר אֲשֶׁר הָבִיאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם אָבִיהֶם שְׁבוּ שְׁבָרוּ־לָנוּ מַעַט־אֶכֶל: ³וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יְהוּדָה לֵאמֹר הָעֵד הָעֵד בָּנוּ הָאִישׁ לֵאמֹר לֹא־תֵרְאוּ פָנַי בְּלִתִּי אֲחִיכֶם אֲתָכֶם: ⁴אִם־יֵשֶׁךְ מִשְׁלַח אֶת־אָחִינוּ אֲתָנוּ נֵרְדָּה וְנִשְׁבְּרָה לָךְ אֶכֶל: ⁵וְאִם־אֵינוֹךְ מִשְׁלַח לֹא נֵרֵד כִּי־הָאִישׁ אָמַר אֵלֵינוּ לֹא־תֵרְאוּ פָנַי בְּלִתִּי אֲחִיכֶם אֲתָכֶם: ⁶וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל לָמָּה הִרְעַתֶּם לִי לְהִגִּיד לָאִישׁ הָעֹד לָכֶם אָח:

37. Reuben He assumes leadership for the last time.

38. is left That is, from his mother.

disaster on the journey Reuben's self-confidence leaves Jacob unimpressed. Deeply con-

cerned about the perils of the journey, Jacob does not see that Reuben is trying to assure him of an ultimate positive outcome—that the vice-roy of Egypt will keep his promise.

THE SECOND JOURNEY TO EGYPT (43:1–34)

Jacob rejects Reuben's plea and offer. But the brothers know that the fear of starvation will ultimately overcome their father's resistance.

2. when they had eaten up There remains only food enough to enable their families to survive while the brothers travel to Egypt and back.

3. Judah He is the spokesman from now on. Reuben is not heard from again, even though he is the firstborn. The incident described in 35:22 shows that he has lost his position of honor in the family.

The man Abbreviated from “the man who

is lord of the land” (42:30,33). Joseph is henceforth called “the man,” while the brothers are correspondingly termed “the men.” This is an artful device of the narrator as events move toward the climactic moment when Joseph discloses his true identity to his brothers.

7. They replied The report the brothers now give to their father does not correspond to the account of the interrogation in chapter 42, when the brothers seemed to offer unsolicited information about themselves quite freely (vv. 11,13). However, from 44:19 it is clear that Jo-

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?’”

⁸Then 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. ⁹I 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. ¹⁰For we could have been there and back twice if we had not dawdled.”

¹¹Then 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

וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׂאוֹל שְׂאֵל־הָאִישׁ לָנוּ
וְלְמוֹלֶדֶתָנוּ לֵאמֹר הָעוֹד אֲבִיכֶם חַי הִישׁ
לָכֶם אֵחַ וְנִגְדְּלוֹ עַל־פִּי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה
הַיְדוּעַ נִדַּע כִּי יֹאמֶר הוֹרִידוּ אֶת־
אֲחֵיכֶם:

וַיֹּאמֶר יִהְיֶה אֶל־יִשְׂרָאֵל אָבִיו שְׁלָחָה
הַנָּעַר אִתִּי וְנִקְוָמָה וְנִלְכָּה וְנַחֲיָה וְלֹא
נָמוּת גַּם־אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם־אַתָּה גַּם־טַפָּנוּ:
⁹אֲנֹכִי אֶעֱרֹבְנוּ מִיָּדִי תִבְקָשְׁנוּ אִם־לֹא
הִבִּיאֲתִיו אֵלַיךָ וְהִצַּגְתִּיו לְפָנֶיךָ וְחָטָאתִי
לָךְ כָּל־הַיָּמִים: ¹⁰כִּי לֹא הָתַמְהָמְהָנוּ
כִּי־עָתָה שְׁבָנוּ זֶה פַּעַמַּיִם:

¹¹וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיהֶם אִם־כֵּן וְ
אֶפֹּאֵ זֹאת עֲשׂוּ קָחוּ מִזִּמְרַת הָאָרֶץ
בְּכֻלֵּיכֶם וְהוֹרִידוּ לָאִישׁ מִנְחָה מִעֵט צָרִי

seph had indeed asked the specific questions referred to here. It must, therefore, be assumed that chapter 42 represents a very abbreviated account.

our family The word *moledet* is used here in the sense of “kindred.”

8. Then Judah said The argument has reached a dead end. Judah steps in to save the situation.

you and we and our children In Hebrew, the order is “we and you and our children.” Judah lists them in ascending order of importance to himself.

the boy The word *na-ar* can be used of any male from infancy (Exod. 2:6) to marriageable age (Gen. 34:19). The probability of Benjamin’s youthfulness accords with, and renders especially poignant, Jacob’s fears and reluctance to let him undertake the journey to Egypt.

9. I myself Meaning, “I personally.”

be surety The Hebrew stem ערב most frequently refers to the acceptance of legal responsibility for a debt contracted by another. The guarantor undertakes to ensure that the bor-

rower will not disappear or to repay the loan should the borrower default.

hold me responsible The Hebrew phrase *lvakkesh mi-yad*, “to hold responsible,” “to require an accounting for,” is particularly used with respect to bloodshed.

forever Personal guilt and blame would weigh on him always.

11. If it must be so Judah’s forceful speech has its effect. The aged Jacob offers no further resistance and resigns himself to the inevitable.

do this The Egyptian vizier must be placated with a gift, and the payments for the grain are to be returned.

choice products of the land The noun *zimirah* in this verse, derived from a similar word in Ugaritic, corresponds to *ko-ah* (strength), which also is used in the sense of “yield, produce” (Gen. 4:12; Hos. 7:9; Job 31:39).

gift The word *minhah* signifies a gift brought as a token of submission.

honey Biblical *d’vash* refers to the thick, intensely sweet syrup made from dates and grapes or figs and is called *dibs* by the Arabs.

CHAPTER 43

8. Reuben had spoken rashly and foolishly to Jacob (42:37—Why would Jacob want to kill

his own grandchildren?). Judah, who had himself experienced the loss of two children (Gen. 38:6–10), is now able to speak convincingly to Jacob’s heart.

and some honey, gum, ladanum, pistachio nuts, and almonds. ¹²And 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. ¹³Take your brother too; and go back at once to the man. ¹⁴And 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.”

¹⁵So the men took that gift, and they took with them double the money, as well as Benjamin. They made their way down to Egypt, where they presented themselves to Joseph. ¹⁶When 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.” ¹⁷The man did as Joseph said, and he brought the men into Joseph’s house. ¹⁸But the men were frightened at being brought into Joseph’s house. “It must be,” they thought, “because of the money replaced in our bags the first time that we have been brought inside, as a pretext to attack us and seize us as slaves, with our pack animals.” ¹⁹So they went up to Joseph’s house steward and spoke to him at the entrance of the house. ²⁰“If you please, my lord,” they said, “we came down once before to procure food. ²¹But when

וּמַעַט דְּבַשׁ נִכְאֹת וְלֹט בְּטָנִים וּשְׂקָדִים:
¹²וְכֶסֶף מִשְׁנָה קָחוּ בְיָדְכֶם וְאֶת־הַכֶּסֶף
הַמּוֹשָׁב בְּפִי אֲמַתְחֹתֵיכֶם תִּשְׁיְבוּ בְיָדְכֶם
אוֹלֵי מִשְׁנָה הוּא: ¹³וְאֶת־אֲחֵיכֶם קָחוּ
וְקוּמוּ שׁוּבוּ אֶל־הָאִישׁ: ¹⁴וְאֵל שְׂדֵי יִתֵּן
לָכֶם רַחֲמִים לִפְנֵי הָאִישׁ וְשַׁלַּח לָכֶם
אֶת־אֲחֵיכֶם אַחֵר וְאֶת־בְּנִימִין וְאֲנִי
בְּאִשֶּׁר שְׂכַלְתִּי שְׂכַלְתִּי:

¹⁵וַיִּקְחוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה הַזֹּאת
וּמִשְׁנָה־כֶּסֶף לָקְחוּ בְיָדָם וְאֶת־בְּנִימִין
וַיָּקָמוּ וַיֵּרְדּוּ מִצְרָיִם וַיַּעֲמֵדּוּ לִפְנֵי יוֹסֵף:
שׁי ¹⁶וַיֵּרָא יוֹסֵף אֹתָם אֶת־בְּנִימִין וַיֹּאמֶר
לְאִשֶּׁר עַל־בֵּיתוֹ הֲבֵא אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים
הַבֵּיתָה וּטְבַח טֶבַח וְהָכֵן כִּי אֲתִי יֵאָכְלוּ
הָאֲנָשִׁים בְּצֹהֲרִים: ¹⁷וַיַּעַשׂ הָאִישׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר
אָמַר יוֹסֵף וַיָּבֵא הָאִישׁ אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים
בֵּיתָה יוֹסֵף: ¹⁸וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים כִּי
הוֹבֵאוּ בֵּית יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמְרוּ עַל־דְּבַר הַכֶּסֶף
הַשֹּׁב בְּאֲמַתְחֹתֵינוּ בַּתְּחִלָּה אֲנַחְנוּ
מוֹבָאִים לְהִתְגַּלֵּל עָלֵינוּ וּלְהִתְנַפֵּל עָלֵינוּ
וּלְקַחַת אֹתָנוּ לַעֲבָדִים וְאֶת־חֲמֹרֵינוּ:
¹⁹וַיִּגְשׁוּ אֶל־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר עַל־בֵּית יוֹסֵף
וַיִּדְבְּרוּ אֵלָיו פֶּתַח הַבַּיִת: ²⁰וַיֹּאמְרוּ כִּי
אֲדֹנֵי יָרֵד יִרְדְּנוּ בַּתְּחִלָּה לְשֹׁבֵר־אֶכָּל:

12. double the money The second clause of this verse clarifies the reason for the double amount. One part is for the purchase of food; the other is to return the sum of money placed in their bags.

a mistake Jacob appears to be trying to convince himself that the return of the money by the Egyptians has no sinister motives.

13. Take your brother The aged patriarch leaves the most painful matter till the end. His use of the words “your brother,” rather than Benjamin, appears to emphasize their fraternal responsibilities.

14. As for me Having done all that is humanly possible, Jacob now leaves the rest to God, whose blessing he invokes.

if I am to be bereaved Jacob’s words opened (v. 11) and now close on a note of sorrowful resignation.

THE BROTHERS IN JOSEPH’S HOUSE (vv. 15–34)

16. his house steward Literally, “the one who is over his house.”

18. frightened Because they alone, of all the buyers of grain, are singled out for this treatment. The brothers are probably aware that high Egyptian officials maintained private dungeons in their homes.

19. at the entrance They lose no time in deterring an accusation.

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.²² And we have brought down with us other money to procure food. We do not know who put the money in our bags.”²³ 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.

²⁴Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house; he gave them water to bathe their feet, and he provided feed for their asses.²⁵ They laid out their gifts to await Joseph's arrival at noon, for they had heard that they were to dine there.

²⁶When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts that they had brought with them into the house, bowing low before him to the ground.²⁷ He greeted them, and he said, “How is your aged father of whom you spoke? Is he still in good health?”²⁸ They replied, “It is well with your servant our father; he is still in

וַיְהִי כִּי־בָּאוּ אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ וַנִּפְתָּחָה אֶת־
אֲמָתֵהֶם וַיִּהְיֶה כֶּסֶף־אִישׁ בְּפִי
אֲמָתֹתָיו כֶּסֶפָּנוּ בְּמִשְׁקָלוֹ וַנִּשָּׁב אֹתוֹ
בִּידָנוּ: ²²וְכֶסֶף אַחֵר הוֹרִדְנוּ בִּידָנוּ
לְשֹׁב־אֶכֶל לֹא יָדָעְנוּ מִי־שָׁם בִּכְסָפֵנוּ
בְּאֲמָתֵהֶם: ²³וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלוֹם לָכֶם אֵל־
תִּירָאוּ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיכֶם נָתַן לָכֶם
מִטְמוֹן בְּאֲמָתֵהֶם כֶּסֶפְכֶּם בָּא אֵלַי
וַיֹּצֵא אֲלֵהֶם אֶת־שִׁמְעוֹן:

²⁴וַיָּבֵא הָאִישׁ אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים בֵּיתָה יוֹסֵף
וַיִּתֵּן־מַיִם וַיְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיהֶם וַיִּתֵּן מִסְפּוֹא
לְחִמְרֵיהֶם: ²⁵וַיִּכְנְיוּ אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה עַד־
בּוֹא יוֹסֵף בַּצְּהָרִים כִּי שָׁמְעוּ כִּי־שָׁם
יֹאכְלוּ לֶחֶם:

²⁶וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף הַבֵּיתָה וַיְבִיאוּ לוֹ אֶת־
הַמִּנְחָה אֲשֶׁר־בְּיָדָם הַבֵּיתָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ־לוֹ
אֶרְצָה: ²⁷וַיִּשְׁאַל לָהֶם לְשָׁלוֹם וַיֹּאמֶר
הַשְׁלוֹם אֲבִיכֶם הֲזָקָן אֲשֶׁר אִמְרָתָם
הָעוֹדְנוּ חַי: ²⁸וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׁלוֹם לְעַבְדְּךָ

v. 26. א' דגושה

21. in full Literally, “by its weight.”

23. All is well This reassurance on the part of the steward is intelligible only if it is assumed that he is privy to Joseph's scheme. His purpose is to lull them into a false sense of security, bolstered by the release of Simeon.

I got your payment Literally, “your money came to me,” a legal formula used by ancient Near Eastern traders to confirm receipt of full payment and implying renunciation of any claim.

27. your aged father The adjective was not reported in the account of the brothers' first meeting with Joseph, but 44:20 shows that it had indeed been used.

28. bowed and made obeisance Either as a sign of appreciation to Joseph for his solicitude in asking about their father's welfare or as a gesture of gratitude to God, a physical equivalent of the verbal “Thank God.”

23. Your God, the God of your father, must have put treasure Joseph has taught the stew-

ard and his other servants to see the hand of God in life's unexpected blessings.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

43:27 How is your aged father Asking about a person's well-being became an expected norm in rabbinic Judaism, both as an act of friendship and as a way of knowing when to fulfill the commandment of visiting the sick (*bikkur holim*) (BT Ned. 39b–40a). We also recite the *Mi she-Berakh* prayer for the sick in the synagogue, in part to beseech God's aid in healing and in part to notify the congregation of who is ill and in need of the support of the community.

good health.” And they bowed and made obeisance.

²⁹Looking 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.” ³⁰With that, Joseph hurried out, for he was overcome with feeling toward his brother and was on the verge of tears; he went into a room and wept there. ³¹Then he washed his face, reappeared, and—now in control of himself—gave the order, “Serve the meal.” ³²They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; for the Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians. ³³As they were seated by his direction, from the oldest in the order of his seniority to the youngest in the order of his youth, the men looked at one another in astonishment. ³⁴Portions were served them from his table; but Benjamin’s portion was several times that of anyone else. And they drank their fill with him.

לְאֶבְיָנוּ עֹדְנָנוּ הִי וַיִּקְדּוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ:
²⁹וַיֵּשֶׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת־בְּנִימִין אָחִיו בֶּן־
 אִמּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר הֲזֶה אַחֲיָכֶם הַקָּטָן אֲשֶׁר
 אָמַרְתֶּם אֵלַי וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יַחֲנֶנּוּ בְנִי:
³⁰וַיִּמְהָר יוֹסֵף כִּי־נִכְמְרוּ רַחֲמָיו אֵל־
 שְׁבִיעִי
 אָחִיו וַיִּבְקֶשׁ לִבְכּוֹת וַיָּבֹא הַחֲדָרָה וַיִּבְךְ
 שָׁמָּה: ³¹וַיִּרְחֹץ פָּנָיו וַיֵּצֵא וַיִּתְּאֲפֶק
 וַיֹּאמֶר שִׁימוּ לִי לֶחֶם: ³²וַיַּשְׁימוּ לוֹ לִבְדּוֹ
 וְלָהֶם לִבְדָּם וְלַמִּצְרִים הָאֹכְלִים אֹתוֹ
 לִבְדָּם כִּי לֹא יוֹכְלוֹן הַמִּצְרִים לֶאֱכֹל
 אֶת־הָעֵבְרִים לֶחֶם כִּי־תוֹעֵבָה הוּא
 לַמִּצְרִים: ³³וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לִפְנֵי הַבָּכָר כַּבְּכָרְתּוֹ
 וְהַצָּעִיר כַּצָּעֲרָתּוֹ
 וַיִּתְּמָהּוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ:
³⁴וַיֵּשֶׂא מִשָּׂאת מֵאֵת פָּנָיו אֱלֹהֶם וַתִּרְבַּ
 מִשָּׂאת בְּנִימִן מִמִּשָּׂאת כָּלֶם חֲמִשׁ יָדוֹת
 וַיִּשְׁתּוּ וַיִּשְׂכְּרוּ עִמּוֹ:

30. overcome with feeling The sight of Benjamin arouses overwhelming tenderness and affection in Joseph. He can find relief only through tears.

31. Serve the meal Joseph hosts a meal for his brothers, who years before had callously sat down to eat while he languished in a pit.

32. They served him by himself Joseph eats alone because of his august status. The Hebrews were segregated because the Egyptians, believing themselves racially and religiously superior to all other peoples, were generally contemptuous of foreigners.

could not dine That is, were prohibited from dining.

33. were seated by his direction Literally, “they sat before him.” Saadia and Rashbam point out that the seating arrangement by descending order of seniority could only be at Joseph’s direction. This surprises the brothers. The Egyptians, too, are astonished that the vizier should invite foreigners—especially shepherds, an abhorrent profession (46:34)—to dine at his house.

34. several Literally, “five.” Joseph is perhaps testing his brothers to see whether this obvious favoritism would arouse their envy or expose any hostile feelings that they might harbor against the one who is now their father’s favorite and Joseph’s as well.

THE BROTHERS’ LAST TRIAL (44:1–34)

After their reception at Joseph’s house, the brothers set out on their homeward journey, undoubtedly in high spirits. Their light mood is shat-

tered, however, as Joseph employs his final stratagem.

44 Then he instructed his house steward as follows, “Fill the men’s bags with food, as much as they can carry, and put each one’s money in the mouth of his bag. ²Put my silver goblet in the mouth of the bag of the youngest one, together with his money for the rations.” And he did as Joseph told him.

³With the first light of morning, the men were sent off with their pack animals. ⁴They 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? ⁵It is the very one from which my master drinks and which he uses for divination. It was a wicked thing for you to do!’”

⁶He overtook them and spoke those words to them. ⁷And they said to him, “Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything of the kind! ⁸Here 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! ⁹Whichever

מד וַיֵּצֵאוּ אֶת־אֲשֶׁר עַל־בֵּיתוֹ לֵאמֹר מִלֵּא אֶת־אֲמָתָחַת הָאֲנָשִׁים אֹכֶל פֶּאֶשֶׁר יוֹכְלוֹן שָׂאת וְשִׁים בְּסֶף־אִישׁ בְּפִי אֲמָתָחוֹ: ²וְאֶת־גְּבִיעִי גְבִיעַ הַכֶּסֶף תָּשִׂים בְּפִי אֲמָתָחַת הַקָּטָן וְאֶת בְּסֶף שִׁבְרוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ כַּדְּבַר יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר: ³הַבֹּקֶר אֹר וְהָאֲנָשִׁים שָׁלְחוּ הֵמָּה וְחִמְרֵיהֶם: ⁴הֵם יֵצְאוּ אֶת־הָעִיר לֹא הִרְחִיקוּ וַיּוֹסֶף אָמַר לְאֲשֶׁר עַל־בֵּיתוֹ קוֹם רִדְף אַחֲרֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהִשְׁגָּתָם וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם לָמָּה שָׁלַמְתֶּם רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה: ⁵הֲלוֹא זֶה אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁתֶּה אֲדֹנִי בּוֹ וְהוּא נִחַשׁ יִנְחַשׁ בּוֹ הִרְעַתָּם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם: ⁶וַיִּשְׁגֹּם וַיִּדְבֹּר אֲלֵהֶם אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה: ⁷וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו לָמָּה יִדְבֹּר אֲדֹנִי בְּדְבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה חֲלִילָה לַעֲבֹדֶיךָ מַעֲשֹׂת בְּדְבַר הַזֶּה: ⁸הֵן כֶּסֶף אֲשֶׁר מָצָאנוּ בְּפִי אֲמָתָחַתֵּינוּ הִשִּׁיבֵנוּ אֵלֶיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וְאִיךָ נִגְנַב מִבֵּית אֲדֹנֶיךָ כֶּסֶף א֥וֹ זָהָב: ⁹אֲשֶׁר יִמָּצֵא אֹתוֹ מֵעַבְדֶּיךָ וּמֵת וְגַם־

JOSEPH’S INSTRUCTIONS (vv. 1–5)

1. Then he instructed These preparations no doubt take place during the night while the brothers sleep.

Fill the men’s bags By supplying them in excess of what their money can buy, Joseph makes them appear all the more ungrateful when they are apprehended for alleged theft.

put each one’s money The restoration of their money this time is puzzling, because it plays no role in the accusation that is soon to be made against them.

2. goblet A “libation vessel” for wine, larger than an ordinary cup and used also as a receptacle for oil in the menorah of the Tabernacle. Here, the goblet serves both as a drinking vessel and as a divining instrument (v. 5).

3. the first light of morning This explains why Joseph is still at home when the brothers later return (v. 14).

4. the city The city is said to be situated “in the region of Goshen.” See Comment to 45:10.

repay good with evil In verse 50:20, Joseph tells his brothers that God used their evil intentions to good end.

5. It is the very one The one they saw him using at dinner. They cannot claim it is their own property.

he uses for divination It is not stated that Joseph actually believes in divination, but he wants the brothers to think he does.

THE STEWARD’S ACCUSATION AND SEARCH (vv. 6–12)

8. How then could we have stolen This inference from a minor premise (“Here”) to a major one (“How then”) is known in rabbinic terminology as *kal va-homer*. There are 10 instances of this type of reasoning in the Bible, listed in Gen. R. 92:7.

of your servants it is found with shall die; the rest of us, moreover, shall become slaves to my lord.” ¹⁰He 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.”

¹¹So each one hastened to lower his bag to the ground, and each one opened his bag. ¹²He searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest; and the goblet turned up in Benjamin’s bag. ¹³At this they rent their clothes. Each reloaded his pack animal, and they returned to the city.

¹⁴When Judah and his brothers reentered the house of Joseph, who was still there, they threw themselves on the ground before him. ¹⁵Joseph said to them, “What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me practices divination?” ¹⁶Judah replied,

אֲנַחְנוּ נָהִיָּה לְאֲדֹנִי לְעֲבָדִים: ¹⁰וַיֹּאמֶר
גַּם־עַתָּה כְּדִבְרֵיכֶם כִּן־הוּא אֲשֶׁר יִמָּצֵא
אֹתוֹ יִהְיֶה־לִּי עֶבֶד וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ נָקִים:
¹¹וַיִּמְהָרוּ וַיּוֹרְדוּ אִישׁ אֶת־אֲמֻתָּתוֹ
אֶרְצָה וַיִּפְתְּחוּ אִישׁ אֲמֻתָּתוֹ:
¹²וַיַּחְפֹּשׂ בַּגְּדוֹל הַחֹל וּבִקְטָן כָּלָה וַיִּמָּצֵא
הַגְּבִיעַ בְּאֲמֻתָּת בְּנִימִן: ¹³וַיִּקְרְעוּ
שְׂמֹלֹתָם וַיַּעֲמֹס אִישׁ עַל־חֻמְרוֹ וַיָּשֻׁבוּ
הָעִירָה:

מפטיר ¹⁴וַיָּבֹא יְהוּדָה וְאָחִיו בֵּיתָה יוֹסֵף וְהוּא
עוֹדְנָו שָׁם וַיִּפְּלוּ לִפְנֵי אֶרְצָה: ¹⁵וַיֹּאמֶר
לָהֶם יוֹסֵף מַה־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר
עָשִׂיתֶם הֲלוֹא יָדַעְתֶּם כִּי־נֹחַשׁ יִנְחַשׁ
אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כָּמֹנִי: ¹⁶וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה מַה־

9. shall die The proposed punishments reflect no known Egyptian law. It is possible that because the brothers are convinced of their innocence, they propose a penalty for themselves that is harsher than the law actually requires.

the rest of us The brothers accept the principle of collective responsibility.

10. what you are proposing The opening words of the steward’s response—literally, “also now according to your words so it is”—could mean, “The penalties you invoke are indeed the law, but I shall be lenient,” or, “I accept the logic of your argument to the effect that you are generally honest.”

shall go free The word *n’kiyim* is a legal term for “cleared of offense or obligation.”

11. hastened Their haste is a demonstration of innocence as well as an attempt to dispose of the entire business as quickly as possible.

12. He searched The steward adroitly manipulates the situation. One can imagine the ris-

ing self-confidence of the brothers after each successive search yielded nothing.

THE RETURN TO JOSEPH (vv. 13–17)

13. they rent their clothes The horror of their predicament leaves them speechless. They can only do what they caused their father to do years before (37:34).

14. Judah He takes the lead, because he took on the safety of Benjamin as his personal obligation.

who was still there Joseph has not yet left the house for his place of work because it is still very early in the morning (v. 3). His presence, therefore, does not raise any suspicion of trickery.

on the ground This addition to the usual phrase expresses their state of utter despair.

15. Joseph said Feigning anger, he addresses them collectively, implying that they are all involved in the theft. His “leniency,” soon to

CHAPTER 44

12. Benjamin’s mother, Rachel, had stolen Laban’s idols and hidden them in her baggage. Will Benjamin be accused of acting similarly

(Gen. R. 92:8)? Joseph’s trap is now set. How will the brothers respond? Will they abandon Benjamin out of resentment of Jacob’s favoring him? Or have they learned how to be brothers?

“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.”¹⁷ 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.”

נֹאמַר לְאֲדֹנִי מִה־נִּדְבָר וּמִה־נִּצְטָדֵק
הָאֱלֹהִים מָצָא אֶת־עֵוֹן עֲבָדֶיךָ הַנֶּנִּי
עֲבָדִים לְאֲדֹנִי גַם־אֲנַחְנוּ גַם־אֲשֶׁר־נִמְצָא
הַגִּבִּיעַ בִּידּוֹ: ¹⁷וַיֹּאמֶר חֲלִילָה לִּי
מִעֲשׂוֹת זֹאת הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר נִמְצָא הַגִּבִּיעַ
בִּידּוֹ הוּא יִהְיֶה־לִּי עֶבֶד וְאַתֶּם עָלוּ
לְשָׁלוֹם אֶל־אֲבִיכֶם: פ

be displayed (v. 17), thus appears to be all the more generous.

practices divination See Comment to verse 5. Because no mention is made of the goblet, it may be assumed that Joseph simply boasts of his ability to detect a thief by divination.

16. the crime of your servants Judah is perhaps falsely confessing collective guilt regarding the theft of the goblet to save Benjamin from being singled out for punishment. Alternatively, he is expressing the ancient belief that suffering is divine punishment for sin, even if the sin could not be identified, and his words are a res-

ignation to misfortune. It also could be a veiled reference to their sale of Joseph.

slaves Judah wisely makes no reference to his earlier rash statement regarding the death penalty (v. 9).

17. Far be it from me Joseph now confronts the brothers with a dilemma. They can save their own lives, but that would be an act of disloyalty to Benjamin and a disaster to their father. Or they can remain with Benjamin, but they would then be unable to bring food to their father and their families, who would die of starvation.