

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

VAYCHI

(Following Yaakov's death), Yosef's brothers said: "Perhaps now Yosef will show us hatred. He will take vengeance on the evil that we plotted against him." They therefore claimed that Yaakov had ordered before his death: "Tell Yosef to forgive your brother's transgressions and sins against you..." (50:16-17).

There is nothing in our story that mentions Yaakov's commanding Yosef to forgive his brothers. Rashi brings the tradition that Yosef's brothers were anxious about Yosef's change of behaviour towards them. Whilst Yaakov was still alive, they were all regular guests around his table. Now, they were no longer on the invitation list. Rashi's sources suggest that Yaakov's words did not include any such order. The brothers made the whole thing up, in order to maintain peace in the family, judging that keeping good relationships within the family was more important than sticking to the raw truth. And the Torah accepted their judgment, as it did not raise the issue of their having invented a story.

Possibly, Rashi's sources that claim that Yaakov never gave such an order are derived from the following. Within the b'rachot, he castigated Reuven

for his involvement with Bilha, and he also severely rebuked Shimon and Levi for their guile and anger in killing the people of Shechem. Yet he didn't rebuke all the brothers for Mechirat Yosef, for the selling of Yosef. That might well be for the following reason. He couldn't rebuke them of something he didn't know about. It seems plausible that Yaakov Avinu never found out the full story, not even to the day of his death. Possibly, in his eyes, he knew that Yosef didn't get on with his brothers and that they hated him, so after a break, he sent him on an errand to Shechem. Yosef might have been attacked and badly injured on the way, his blood having spurted all over his coat of many colours which his attackers threw on the wayside and which was later discovered and recognized by this brothers on their return journey and handed over to their father. In the meantime, Yosef somehow recovered from his wounds and made his way to Egypt. Maybe, he used his talents and G-d's support to climb the Egyptian hierarchy to his present exalted and extremely powerful position. That would hardly been out character with the dreams regarding which, he, Yaakov Avinu SHAMAR ET HADAVAR: waited to see what the outcome would be (37:11).

One could offer an additional explanation why Yaakov didn't tell Yosef to forgive his brothers, which

finds expression in Yosef's reply to the brothers' expressing their apprehensions: "Don't be afraid... am I in place of G-d? ... It was G-d who made it come out good" (50:19-20). For it was G-d directing what was going on, not the free will of the brothers.

According to this explanation, by then Yaakov Avinu might have known the whole story, but he did not rebuke his children for the Mechirat Yosef for the following reason. Reuven, Shimon, and Levi's methods of handling the particular situations they found themselves in were well in character with their personalities and limitations as he knew them. In contrast, the extreme hatred and jealousy of all Yosef's brothers arising over just a couple of trivial youthful indiscretions was behaviour that was utterly and completely out of character. It couldn't be, it was just not them! It was, surely, G-d directing the brothers, and the brothers did not even know it. As we are told: "the brothers were jealous", and he, Ya'akov Avinu, "waited to see what the outcome would be". It was specifically because of their jealousy which was quite out of proportion and quite out of character that Yaakov did pay attention, but he said nothing at the time. He knew that G-d was operating plans precisely as all so far removed from the ordinary that he knew that his work was not to

intervene, but to watch.

The same happened years later when the brothers first appeared before Yosef in Egypt. Yosef reasoned that through his brothers, G-d was putting into place a series of events that would lead to a destiny whose details only He knew. He therefore wisely held back and did not intervene by revealing himself, but followed the example set by his father: he went along with the situation to see how things would turn out. Indeed, Yosef had seen the hand of G-d in his destiny so many times in his own life that he could sense that that his brothers' attitude towards him did not arise out of anything he did, but through extraordinary divine intervention.

It was for that reason that Yosef told the brothers later that it was not them, but G-d that sent him to Egypt and raised him to a position of great power and responsibility. And he did not flinch from that position now. He was effectively telling the brothers that all that had happened was G-d's prompting for the ultimate good.

The ways of G-d are fully known only to Him. When strange and out-of-character series of events happen and we don't know why. A series of failures when the expected is success. And for that matter, a series of successes when the expected is failure. But we can learn from here

that G-d can well be orchestrating things behind the scenes and that there are times when we should consider recognizing and falling in with His plans, and patiently observe rather than protest about injustice or boast of one's successes, even where we don't fully understand at the time.

