



It's All About Loyalty

Jacob's Final Wish

In this week's Torah portion, Jacob passes away. Shortly before his death, he tells Joseph his final wish:

"Please do not bury me in Egypt."

Joseph immediately acquiesces: "I will do as you say."

Nonetheless, Jacob isn't satisfied.

"Swear to me," he tells Joseph — and Joseph takes an oath.

And then, the Torah tells us, "Israel bowed at the head of the bed."

This dialogue appears at the beginning of this week's parsha; Vayechi, which concludes the book of Genesis.

What exactly does the Torah mean by saying that Israel bowed at the head of the bed? What was he doing? What is the message here?

Rashi says that Jacob was thanking G-d that all his children followed in his path. "Joseph was a king, and moreover, he had been kidnapped and taken among the non-Jews — and he had preserved his righteousness." Jacob felt it necessary to demonstrate his thanks towards G-d.

But why now? Why did Jacob wait 17 years to thank G-d for Joseph's righteousness? He should have done so as soon as he arrived in Egypt

and saw Joseph's character, which hadn't changed over the 22 years of their separation. He should have thanked G-d then!

The answer is tied into the sad story of Joseph's sale.

Joseph's True Allegiance

Jacob's favorite child was Joseph, but he knew that it didn't make Joseph more popular in his family. When Joseph told him about his dream of the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing to him, he rebuked him (Genesis 37:10).

Later, Jacob sent Joseph to Shechem to check on his brothers, despite knowing that his brothers despised him. Joseph immediately agreed to go, saying "*Hineini*—I am here!" The Midrash says that "whenever Jacob would remember that exchange, his stomach would turn over" (Bireishis Rabbah 6:13). Indeed, it was a fateful choice; when he reached his brothers, they kidnapped him and sold him into slavery, and he was taken to Egypt, where he ended up in prison for 12 years.

Meanwhile, Joseph didn't know what was going on back at home. He had no idea that his brothers dipped his coat in goat's blood and told their father that he had been killed. What was he thinking? How did he understand the situation?

He was sold into slavery and imprisoned — and his father didn't even look for him. What would you have thought in his place?

Then, after 12 years in prison without hearing a word from his father, his life suddenly takes a turn for the better. The king of Egypt discovers the young interpreter of dreams, invites him to the palace, and takes care of him. He appreciates his input and even appoints him to be second to the king! He also gives him a wife and helps him start a family. In simple terms, Pharaoh adopted him. He trusted him as a father trusts a child, and therefore appointed him to that position.

Joseph received a new lease on life.

Years pass, and Jacob finally appears in Egypt. The long-separated father and son hug and kiss and cry over each other — but Joseph now finds himself in a delicate situation. He loves and is dedicated to his father, Jacob, but he is also loyal to Pharaoh, who took him out of prison, brought him to greatness, and relied on him to lead the entire country.

Either way, seventeen years passed peacefully. Joseph continues leading the country, makes occasional visits to his father, and everyone is happy.

But then, there is a clash. As Jacob approaches death, he realizes that while *he* wants to be buried in the Cave of Machpelah, Pharaoh wants him buried in Egypt. Jacob had been a source of blessing for the country; the famine ceased as soon as he stepped foot into their land. Why should they allow him to leave? In fact, we find that Laban didn't want Jacob to leave either, saying that G-d had blessed him due to his presence (Vayetze 30:2 and in Rashi). (Toras Menachem vol. 48 pg. 408 fn. 66)

This was the first time that the wishes of Jacob and Pharaoh clashed. Joseph couldn't make them both happy; he needed to choose one. And, the Rebbe adds: "Being the ruler of Egypt who fulfilled his role honestly, Joseph was actually obligated to see to the benefit of the country — and that included keeping Jacob there."

Nonetheless, he swore to fulfill his father's request.

At that moment, he demonstrated that his loyalty to Jacob was greater than his allegiance to pharaoh.

When Jacob saw that his son was ready to bring him to the land of Israel; when he "passed the test" of the clash of interests between

Pharaoh and Jacob, he was finally convinced that his family was complete — and he turned to heaven to thank G-d.

Jewish Characteristic #1

This problem of double loyalty has often been a test for the Jewish people.

Henry Kissinger who was the first Jewish Secretary of State, was by Divine Providence, appointed only two weeks before the Yom Kippur war. At the time, he was attacked from all directions. Jews accused him of being not supportive enough of Israel during those difficult days, while antisemites accused him of prioritizing Israel's interests over those of the United States.

Kissinger himself often said that in the days before the war broke out, he personally questioned the American and Israeli intelligence, and they both told him that war would not break out according to their information.

When the war actually broke out, the United States assumed that Israel would be victorious as in the previous war. But on the third day of the war, when they saw the tremendous disaster, Kissinger promised aid to Israel — even before consulting with Nixon. He told Israel to empty their stocks of ammunition because America would be replenishing the supplies.

Indeed, The United States kept its promise, and during the 32 days of the war, the American Air Force transported over 22,000 tons of tanks, artillery, and ammunition in the air, while a 'seatrail' brought 33,000 tons of supplies.

Kissinger always said that his identity as a Jew who escaped Germany in 1938 from Nazi persecution profoundly impacted his work and his support for Israel. He always ensured that Israel would remain strong and powerful, because he knew that a weak Israel would allow the

Arabs to take advantage of them.

In the moment of truth, Kissinger's Jewish instinct led him to be loyal to the Jewish people and come to their aid.

When G-d chose the first Jew, Abraham, what characteristics did he look for? We find the answer in the prayer we recite daily about Abraham: "You found his heart to be loyal before you." It's all about loyalty. When our interests clash with the interests of the Creator of the world, where do our loyalties lie?

P.S. Henry Kissinger's Jewish name was Abraham.