

## CHIZUK AND IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra  
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael -  
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

Yosef's behaviour in this week's Parsha raises many questions. First, and foremost, amongst them, is the point raised by the Ramban (B'reishit 42:9) regarding the almost unbelievable fact that Yosef does not try to contact his father to inform him that he is alive and well. How is one to make sense of this strange fact? Why torment his father by letting him grieve and mourn for no purpose? Clearly, there were times when Yosef's lowly situation did not allow him to do so, but why did he not send such a message once he had attained a position of leadership in the home of one of the kingdom's important officials? After all, the distances involved were not very substantial – Egypt being a mere six days' travel from Chevron - and as the Ramban adds, we would have maintained this same expectation of Yosef even if it would have taken the messenger a full year to travel the distance...

As the story unfolds, and we read of how Yosef tortures and toys with his brothers, we wonder, together with the Abarbanel: Why did Yosef hide his identity from his brothers and speak so harshly to them? Even if he wanted to be vengeful and exact recrimination, why wasn't he concerned about the added anguish this would cause his Father?

The Ramban's answer is that Yosef viewed the dreams of his youth as a form of prophecy. He related to the content of the dreams as a divine directive and felt duty bound to do all in his power to make these dreams come true. Yosef

believed that his life mission was to bring about a situation in which his brothers, like the sheaves of grain in his dream, would bow down and prostrate themselves before him. An additional angle, which can help explain the reasoning behind Yosef's actions, is that Yosef felt the need to ascertain the brothers' current feelings towards Binyamin before he could reveal himself to them. He needed to know whether the brothers had done Teshuva for having forsaken Yosef by throwing him into the pit, realizing that by acting impulsively he might be endangering his brother. [-To his deep satisfaction, Yosef sees that his brothers have clearly learnt their lesson. Yehuda redeems them all by showing that he is prepared to forsake his own life in order to save that of his brother Binyamin].

This traditional rendering of the story, as can be found in the works of the Ramban and Abarbanel, was challenged by Rav Yoel Bin-Nun. Rav Bin-Nun suggested a radically different explanation of Yosef's inner motivation in orchestrating the different events. Rav Bin-Nun surmises that Yosef may have felt that he had been renounced by his father. This surprising claim stems from the realization that Yosef was unaware of many of the details that we - as readers of the Torah's account are privy to. If we take into account the fact that Yosef was completely unaware of the fabricated story the brothers had presented to their father; if we remember that Yosef did not know that the brothers had convinced Yaakov that Yosef had been killed by a wild animal - we can begin to understand how Yosef may have looked at the whole story from a totally different perspective. Yosef surely assumed that his father knew that his beloved son had been

abducted and sold into slavery. From Yosef's partial perspective, the most troubling question was surely the following: Seeing as Yaakov was a wealthy individual, why did his father not send a search party to locate Yosef and free him from the hands of those who imprisoned and enslaved him? Did he not care about his son's fate?!

Tormented by these thoughts, Yosef may have reached the utterly devastating, but at the same time, logical conclusion: His Father had decided to write him off... Yaakov must have decided that if he had to choose between Yosef or his other ten sons, then he would go with the majority... As a result of this understanding, Yosef decided to turn his back on his past. He would seal away all of his unpleasant memories and set out to create a new life for himself. This was surely not an easy task, and thus he decides to commemorate his achievement naming his son 'Menashe' - for G-d has made me forget - Nashani - my labors and my Father's home (B'reishit 41:51). Yosef had successfully put his past behind him, he was looking forward towards a peaceful future, when suddenly, out of the blue, his former life intrudes upon the tranquil existence he had erected around him. His forgotten family suddenly appear on his doorstep, this time, however, they are utterly powerless and completely at his mercy... This novel picture clearly explains Yosef's initial vindictive approach, which is later overturned when he finds himself utterly overcome with love and affection.

These two approaches differ greatly in their understanding of Yosef's role in bringing about the Divine plan: Was Yosef proactively taking the initiative,

doing his utmost to make the divinely inspired dream come true, or was he an almost passive pawn, together with his brothers, as the Divine choreographer orchestrated the entire scene against the wishes of all those involved?

These two different possibilities present themselves to us throughout our lives, specifically in regard to Aliyah: Do we passively wait for the Divine vision of Kibbutz Galuyot to be played out and only then ascend upon the outstretched wings of the last eagle? Or, do we actively take our destiny in our hands, following the lead of the Gaon of Vilna who constantly encouraged his talmidim to make Aliyah, and do our best to actualize the Divine dream of redemption?

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