



The Text:

Judah's humble plea for mercy towards Benjamin is accompanied by an attempt to shake Joseph's confidence in his position of power:

Judah said to Joseph, "Upon whom do you place your trust? Do you place your trust on Pharaoh? Pharaoh himself makes decrees and does not keep them – for it says in the laws of Egypt that a slave may not rule [and Pharaoh appointed you, a former slave, as ruler of Egypt]."

The Question:

Judah claims Pharaoh is unreliable, since he appointed Joseph ruler in contravention of his own laws. But Pharaoh did it to save Egypt from starvation! Whether or not we agree with his actions, it hardly seems to show that Pharaoh is a liar. On the other hand, it *does* show Pharaoh's esteem for Joseph; he disregarded his own laws because he considered Joseph such an asset. Wouldn't Judah's emphasis of these facts therefore *increase* Joseph's confidence in Pharaoh's appreciation for him?

The Answer:

Pharaoh may have seen the appointment of Joseph as critical for the survival of the country – but he could have annulled his previous decree, instead of simply violating it; at the very least, he should have expressed some remorse at the inconsistency involved, however necessary. By his total lack of concern, Pharaoh demonstrated a disregard for truth. An unreliable friend is no friend at all. Pharaoh may have valued Joseph, but a true relationship is founded on loyalty and integrity.

The Message:

One of life's most difficult challenges is the temptation to compromise our standards in favor of those we love. But honesty and integrity are the true basis of love; when we bend the truth, we damage those very relationships we hold so dear, ultimately hurting our loved ones far more than we help them. Our greatest service to those we care about is to maintain our commitment to truth.

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Benjamin is framed as a thief. Joseph announces that he will keep Benjamin as a slave.

Judah, who has personally sworn to his father to bring Benjamin home at all costs, steps forward to plead on his behalf. Emphasizing the grief Jacob will experience if Benjamin does not return, Judah offers himself as a slave in Benjamin's place. Judah reveals the sincerity and devotion Joseph has been hoping to see; Joseph decides that the moment has arrived to reveal his identity. To spare his brothers from embarrassment, Joseph sends everyone out of the room.

With his ringing declaration, "I am Joseph!" all is suddenly, shatteringly clear. Joseph is ruler of Egypt. His dreams of kingship were not adolescent fantasies but true prophecy; Joseph was never a dangerous upstart but a Divinely ordained leader. The brothers are speechless with humiliation.

Joseph utters not a word of rebuke, instead using every means at his disposal to convince his brothers not to blame themselves. He instructs them to return with all haste to Canaan, collect their families, and settle in Egypt. Joseph emphasizes that his travails were obviously part of a Divine plan to bring him to a leadership role, enabling him to sustain Jacob's family during these years of famine. In a larger context, the children of Israel's emigration to Egypt is the first step in the fulfillment of Jewish destiny; Joseph's position enables them to arrive in Egypt as honored guests rather than miserable captives.

Informed that Joseph is alive, Jacob reacts first with disbelief, then with joy. His spirit revives, and he regains the prophetic inspiration that has been absent for the twenty-two years he has been in mourning.

Jacob travels to Egypt; en route, G-d promises him that he will survive the dangerous environment of Egypt and eventually return to the Holy Land. Jacob and Joseph experience a tearful reunion.

Joseph instructs his brothers to introduce themselves to Pharaoh as shepherds, an occupation despised by the sheep-worshipping Egyptians. Joseph settles his family in Goshen, a fertile district removed from the depraved culture of metropolitan Egypt.

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