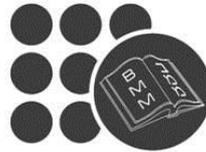


The Pit and the Rope: Recovering Joseph  
Part II



Credit to: Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg and Amnon Melzer

Source 1: Bereishit 44:18

Then Judah approached him and said, "Please, my lord, let now your servant speak something into my lord's ears

וַיִּגַשׁ אֵלָיו יְהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי אֲדֹנָי יְדִבֶּר נָא עַבְדְּךָ דְבָר  
בְּאָזְנֵי אֲדֹנָי

Source 2: Midrash Bereishit Rabba 93:3

It is written, "Deep waters are counsel in a man's heart" (Prov. 20: 5). This can be compared to a deep well full of cold water— its water was cold and fresh, but no one could drink it. Then someone came and tied rope to rope, cord to cord, string to string, and drew the water and drank. Then, everyone began to draw the water and drink. In the same way, Judah did not stir till he had responded to Joseph, word by word, and had reached his heart.

כתיב (משלי כ) מים עמוקים עצה בלב איש וגו',  
לבאר עמוקה מלאה צונן והיו מימיה צוננין ויפין  
ולא היתה בריה יכולה לשתות הימנה בא אחד  
וקשר חבל בחבל ונימה בנימה משיחה במשיחה  
ודלה הימנה ושתה התחילו הכל דולין הימנה  
ושותין, כך לא זז יהודה משיב ליוסף דבר על דבר  
עד שעמד על לבו

Source 3: Sfat Emet here

Va-yiggash—" And Judah drew close to him": that is, to Joseph. But also, to himself, his true self. And also, to God. The meaning here is that although Judah said nothing new in his speech and had no real claim to make on Joseph, yet since he clarified the truth of the matter, salvation came to him, as we find in the idea that "Truth springs up from the earth."

**בפסוק** ולא יוכל יוסף להתאפק כו'. דכתיב ויגש  
אליו יהודה פי' אליו ליוסף. גם אל  
עצמותו פי' לעצמו. גם פי' אליו להקב"ה. וביאור  
הענין כי הנה יהודה לא חידש דבר באלה הדברים  
וגם לא היה לו טענה צמח לבוא ליוסף. אעפ"כ  
לאשר בירר אמתות הענין בא לו הישועה. כענין  
אמת מארץ תלמח

Source 4: Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg: The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious

"How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me, lest I see the evil which will befall my father?" (Gen. 44: 34). With these words, Judah accesses a new knowledge: it is now impossible for him to witness his father's anguish at the loss of another son. He acknowledges, in fact, that it was always impossible to witness that anguish.

Communicating the pathos of the father who after the loss of one son would die of yet another loss, Judah — in passing, as it were— records his father's reference to my wife and two sons... The fact that he is capable of registering his father's unconscious repudiation of himself... gives compassionate force to his words.

For Judah to come to his true self is to come to God. And to access Joseph is to give voice to the silent God, as well as to something muted in himself. What he affirms unconsciously in his speech is the unknowable heart— of his father, of his God, at his own core. An omnipotent fantasy is relinquished; he speaks with the voice of reticent power that can touch Joseph's unknowable heart.

Source 5: Sfat Emet, Vayigash page 254

And it is written: "And Yosef could not restrain himself... and none stood with him when Yosef became known." This is difficult – since it says "with him" why do we need "when Yosef became known"? It seems that before this he was not Yosef.

וכתיב ולא יוכל  
יוסף להתאפק כו' ולא עמד איש אתו בהתודע יוסף  
כו' וקשה כיון דכ' אתו מה בהתודע יוסף. כנראה  
שמקודם לא היה יוסף.

Source 6: Bereishit 45:3, 15

3. And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" but his brothers could not answer him because they were startled by his face.

ג. וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אֶחָיו אֲנִי יוֹסֵף הֲעוֹד אָבִי חַי וְלֹא יָקְלוּ  
אֶחָיו לְעֹנוֹת אֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהָלוּ מִפָּנָיו

15. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and afterwards his brothers spoke with him.

טו. וַיִּנָּשֶׂק לְכָל אֶחָיו וַיִּבְכֶּה עֲלֵהֶם וְאַחֲרָיִךְ דִּבְרוּ אִתּוֹ

### Source 7: Pri Tzadik, Vayigash page 213

“And his brothers couldn’t answer him because they were bewildered from his face.” Seemingly it should have said “from him”, with one less letter [in Hebrew]. However, because when the time came for Yosef to make himself known, he no longer hid the light of his face from them, and then they recognised him in truth, and they were bewildered from the light of his face, that they saw in it that he was Yosef. Within this idea, we can also explain what it says when Yosef comes to his father “and he went up to greet Yisrael his father at Goshen, and he appeared to him” that the words, “and he appeared to him” seem to be superfluous, as the Ramban points out. However, it is a hint to what we said above, that at the time he came to his father, he revealed himself to show the light of his face, that he maintained his holiness.

ולא יכלו אחיו לענות אותו  
כי נבהלו מפניו דלכאורה הול"ל ממנו ומה הלשון מפניו  
שמיותר אות. אמנם מפני שבשבא העת להתודע להם  
אז שוב לא הסתיר את מאור פניו מהם ואז הכירוהו  
באמת ונבהלו ממאור פניו שראו בו שהוא יוסף. ובענין  
הזה י"ל ג"כ במש"נ אח"כ שבא יוסף אל אחיו שנא'  
ויעל לקראת ישראל אביו גשנה וירא אליו וגו' שתיבות  
וירא אליו נראה כמיותר וכמ"ש הרמב"ן ע"ש אמנם  
הוא על רמז הג"ל שבעת שבא אל אחיו נתגלה אליו  
להראות לו את מאור פניו שלו שנתקיים בקדושתו :

### Source 8: Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg: The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious

The effect of such a testimony is to restore Joseph to the world of language, to the possibilities of a redemptive connection with his past, his family, and his future. He utters a brief— too brief— testimony to the past. But “his brothers could not answer him, for they were dumbfounded before him”. A dangerous silence greets his testimony. Instead of triumphal closure, mutual confessions, and admissions, the Torah gives us a confounded silence that Joseph tries to break with a long speech of forgiveness. But this speech, I suggest, is precisely not the kind of witness to himself and to the past that might have retrieved the true selves of Joseph, his brothers, and God. The old pact of silence is not broken. Indeed, after Joseph speaks, the silence endures. It is only when he embraces his brothers and “cries over them” that they respond: “And after that, his brothers spoke with him”.

### Source 9: Bereishit 45:27 and Rashi there

And they told him all of Joseph's words that he had said to them, and he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, and the spirit of their father Jacob was revived.

וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֵלָיו אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵהֶם וַיֵּרָא  
אֶת הָעֲגָלוֹת אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף לְשֵׂאת אֹתוֹ וַתְּחִי רוּחַ יַעֲקֹב  
אֲבִיהֶם:

**all of Joseph's words:** He (Joseph) gave them a sign, viz., in what topic he was engaged when he (Joseph) separated from him (Jacob). [That was] the section dealing with the heifer that was to be beheaded (עֲרֹפָה) (Deut. 21), and this is what [Scripture] says, “and he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent,” and it (Scripture) does not say, “that Pharaoh had sent.”

**את כל דברי יוסף:** סימן מסר להם במה היה עוסק  
כשפירש ממנו, בפרשת עגלה ערופה, זהו שאמר  
וירא את העגלות אשר שלח יוסף ולא אמר אשר שלח  
פרעה:

### Source 10: Zohar Bereishit, Vayigash page 205a

Rebbi Eliezer said: Yosef hinted to Yaakov with the Eglah Arufah, because at that time he separated from him. The Eglah Arufah is brought when a murder victim is found and we do not know who killed him... Come and see that when Yosef separated from his father, he was sent without accompaniment and without food, and what happened happened, and when Yaakov says “Yosef has surely been torn... I will go down mourning into the grave” because I caused it; and I knew that his brothers hated him and I sent him! And this is what Yosef was hinting to him.

רבי אלעזר אמר רמז רמז ליה יוסף ליעקב על  
עגלה ערופה דהא בההוא פרקא אתפרש מניה  
ואוקמוה, עגלה ערופה דאיה אטיא על דאשתכח  
קטולא ולא אתיידע מאן קטיל ליה  
תא חזי יוסף כד אתפרש מאבוי בלא לוייה ובלא  
אכילה אשתדר והוה מה דהוה, וכד אמר יעקב  
(בראשית ל"ז) טרוף טרוף יוסף אמר כי ארד אל  
בני אבל שאולה דאנא גרימנא ליה ותו דהוינא ידע  
דאחוי סניין ליה ושדרנא ליה ורמז קא רמיז ליה

### Source 11: Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg: The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious

In this narrative, there is no retrieving that pristine light. But like the shattered Truth that God throws down to earth, the fragments of Joseph's light can be recomposed.

In the Midrash, this is perhaps the optimistic message of the wagons: I remember the Torah we shared, I am unchanged, we will resume where we left off. But in the Zohar's darker reading, too, there is hope. For if Joseph cannot bear explicit witness to his death and resurrection, his language can, through the words of Torah, and within the intimacy of two— father and son— who learn Torah together, pass through its own answerlessness. And if the original light of his face is irretrievable, the light born of the “thousand darknesses” has its own brilliance. It can strike his brothers dumb with its radiant and dangerous testimony. It can also pierce his father's heart, with the conviction that Joseph has survived.

## Source 12: Bereishit 50:14-21

14. And Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers, and all who had gone up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father.

י. וַיָּשָׁב יוֹסֵף מִצְרָיִם הוּא וְאָחָיו וְכָל הָעֲלִים אֲתוֹ לְקַבֵּר אֶת אָבִיו אַחֲרֵי קִבְרוֹ אֶת אָבִיו:

15. Now Joseph's brothers saw that their father had died, and they said, "Loo Joseph will hate us and return to us all the evil that we did to him."

טו. וַיֵּרְאוּ אָחִי יוֹסֵף כִּי מֵת אָבִיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ יִשְׁטְמֵנוּ יוֹסֵף וְהַשֵּׁב יִשִּׁיב לָנוּ אֶת כָּל הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר גָּמְלָנוּ אֹתוֹ:

16. So they commanded [messengers to go] to Joseph, to say, "Your father commanded [us] before his death, saying,

טז. וַיֹּצֵא אֵל יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר אָבִיךָ צִוָּה לְפָנָי מוֹתוֹ לֵאמֹר:

17. 'So shall you say to Joseph, "Please, forgive now your brothers' transgression and their sin, for they did evil to you. Now please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." ' ' Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

יז. כֹּה תֹאמְרוּ לְיוֹסֵף אֲנֵא שָׂא נָא פְשַׁע אָחִיךָ וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי רָעָה גָּמְלוּךָ וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא לְפָשַׁע עַבְדֵי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ וַיִּבֶן יוֹסֵף בְּדִבְרָם אֱלֹהֵי:

18. His brothers also went and fell before him, and they said, "Behold, we are your slaves."

יח. וַיִּלְכוּ גַם אָחִיו וַיִּפְּלוּ לְפָנָיו וַיֹּאמְרוּ הִנְנוּ לְךָ לְעַבְדִּים:

19. But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid, for am I instead of God?"

יט. וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף אַל תִּירְאוּ כִּי הִתַּחַת אֱלֹקִים אֲנִי:

20. Indeed, you intended evil against me, [but] God designed it for good, in order to bring about what is at present to keep a great populace alive.

כ. וְאַתֶּם חִשַּׁבְתֶּם עָלַי רָעָה אֲלֵקִים חִשְׁבָה לְטֹבָה לְמַעַן עֲשֵׂה כִּי־זֶה הָיָה לְהַחֲיֵת עִם רַב:

21. So now do not fear. I will sustain you and your small children." And he comforted them and spoke to their hearts.

כא. וְעַתָּה אַל תִּירְאוּ אֲנֹכִי אֲכַלְכֵּל אֶתְכֶם וְאֶת טַפְּכֶם וַיְנַחֵם אוֹתָם וַיְדַבֵּר עַל לִבָּם:

## Source 13: Midrash Chemdat Yamim

Why did Joseph not forgive his brothers, in spite of their plea ("Please forgive the offense and guilt of your brothers")? Because a person cannot be forgiven unless he pleads face-to-face; and the brothers sent a messenger; they did not speak for themselves, but through the device of "Your father left this instruction."

## Source 14: Rashi to Bereishit 50:15

לו has many different meanings. לו is used as an expression of request or to denote "if only," [as in these examples:] "If only (לו) it would be as you say" (Gen. 30:34); "If only (לו) you would listen to me" (ibid. 23:13); "If only (לו) we had been content" (Josh. 7:7); "If only (לו) we had died" (Num. 14:2). לו sometimes means "if" (אם) or "perhaps" (אוּלַי), e.g., "If (לו) they had been wise" (Deut. 32:29); "Had (לו) you hearkened to My commandments" (Isa. 48: 18); "And even if (לו) I should weigh on my palms" (II Sam. 18:12). לו sometimes serves as an expression of "perhaps," [as in] "Perhaps (לו) will hate us" (Gen. 50:15). And there is no similar use [of this word] in Scriptures.

שְׂמָא יִשְׁטַמְנוּ. לו מִתְחַלֵּק לְעֵינַיִם הַרְבֵּה, יֵשׁ לוּ מִשְׁמַשׁ בְּלִשׁוֹן בְּקִשָּׁה וּלְשׁוֹן הַלּוּאִי, כְּגוֹן (לְעִיל ל לֵד) לוּ יִהְיֶה כְּדַבְרִיךָ, (שֶׁם כִּי יֵג) לוּ שְׁמַעְנִי, (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ ז ז) וְלוּ הוֹאֲלָנוּ, (בְּמַדְבַּר יֵד ב) לוּ מִתְּנוּ. וְיֵשׁ לוּ מִשְׁמַשׁ בְּלִשׁוֹן אִם וְאוּלַי, כְּגוֹן (דְּבָרִים לֵב כֹּט) לוּ חֲכַמּוֹ, (יִשְׁעִיָּה מֵח יח) לוּ הַקִּשְׁבֵת לְמִצּוֹתַי, (שְׁמוּאֵל ב' יח יב) וְלוּ אֲנִי שׁוֹקֵל עַל כַּפִּי. וְיֵשׁ לוּ מִשְׁמַשׁ בְּלִשׁוֹן שְׂמָא לוּ יִשְׁטַמְנוּ, וְאִין לוּ עוֹד דּוּמָה בְּמִקְרָא

## Source 15: Ohr Hachaim there

Why would the text use an expression the usual meaning of which is the opposite of its meaning in this context? Since here, unmistakably, the meaning is "lest Joseph hate us," the appropriate word would be pen or ulai. But there is another level of meaning: they hope that he will pay them back ... and that they will suffer in some way commensurate with the suffering that they caused him. In such a case, they would not have been condemned to the exiles and sufferings that were the consequence of this sin— as the Sages have said of the Egyptian exile and of our present exile. See, for example, the midrash about the Ten Martyrs.

וְצִרִיךְ לְדַעַת לְמָה יִדְבַר הַכְּתוּב לְשׁוֹן זֶה שְׂמַשְׁמַעוֹתוֹ הַרְגִיל הוּא הַפֶּךְ הַכּוֹוֹנָה, וְהַגֵּם שְׂאִין מְקוֹם לְטַעוֹת הַלְבִּין בּו זולת דְּלִמָּא, אִפְּעַל כֵּן הוּא לֹא לִמְרָ לְשׁוֹן צוֹדֵק פֶּן אוּ אֹלַי. וְנִרְאָה כִּי הַכְּתוּב דְּבָרֵי עֲצֻמוֹ קְאָמֵר לוּ, וְהַכּוֹוֹנָה בְּזֶה שְׂהֵם יִרְאוּ עַל דְּבַר שְׂהִלּוּאֵי שִׁיְהִיָּה כֵּן שִׁיְהִיָּה מְשִׁיב לָהֶם וְהוּא אֹמֵר וְיִשִּׁיב לָנוּ אֶת כָּל הָרָעָה וְהִיוּ מִצְטַעְרִים הַשְּׁבִטִים כְּשִׁיעוֹר שְׂנַצְטַעַר יוֹסֵף מִצַּדָּם וּבְזֶה לֹא הִיוּ מִתְחַיִּיבִים לְבִסּוֹף מִהַגְלִיּוֹת וּמִהַצְרֹת בְּעַד חֲטָא זֶה כְּאוֹמֵרם ז"ל (שְׁבַת י ב) גְלוֹת מִצְרַיִם וְגַם בְּגִלוֹת הָאֲחֵרוֹן, וְצָא וְלָמַד מֵהָיָה לְעֵשְׂרֵה עֲמוּדֵי עוֹלָם

## Source 13: Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg: The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious

Joseph does not actually forgive his brothers. The tangled dynamics of their relationship make it all but impossible for him to do so. The midrash, then, is claiming that there is no closure to this anguished saga. The channels of language are never fully opened; a blockage persists through the apparent reconciliation of the last passage.

Like the "Never mind" response to an apology, Joseph's providential speech disturbs even as it purports to soothe. A hope of redress withers. The narratable anguish of the past is subsumed in a fiction of closure. And precisely here is the core of the irony: in his anxiety to reveal the end, to resolve the narrative in full meaning, Joseph suppresses the conflicts in his family and within himself.

The problem with Joseph's superiority, his problem-solving wisdom, is that he really is wise, and superior. His advice to Pharaoh is sound. But his authority suppresses conflict— a blessing perhaps when practical decisions have to be made. However, imposing a providential pattern over the raw dream of family relationships may settle too many old scores, without first sufficiently unsettling them.