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Parshat Vayeishev

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Tainted Intent

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The story of Yoseph's discord with his brothers' waxes as a factual, albeit eternal, analogy to feuding Jews. There are dreams and fantasies, jealousies and misconceptions. Unfortunately, the saga never seems to end, as even today it seems that there are those of our brethren who would sell out their kin – all for the sake of Heaven.

The Torah relates: Yoseph's brothers go to Shechem to tend the flock of their father, Yaakov. Yoseph is sent by Yaakov to find out what they are up to. As he approaches them they declare, "Behold, the dreamer approaches." At first they plot to kill him but Reuvain and Yehuda intervene, one suggesting he be cast into a pit, and the other convincing the brothers to sell him to passing merchants.

Were the plans to rid themselves of their younger sibling premeditated, or was the sale an impromptu action based on sighting Yoseph as he approached them? Let us analyze the story and the commentaries.

Yaakov asked his children to tend his sheep. The verse tells us that, "Now, his brothers went to pasture their father's flock in Shechem." In the Hebrew language, a prefix "es" is often used in conjunction with a noun. Here it is used in conjunction with the word sheep. Es is a word usually placed to allude to something additional. (e.g. the famous command, "In the command, 'Honor your father and your mother' the Torah adds an es before the words father and mother, "Honor es your father and es your mother." The extra word es is there to include elder siblings, stepparents and the like, all who must be afforded honor.) In this case the word es in conjunction with the sheep is not only extra, it also has dots above it. Those dots intone, says Rashi, in the name of the Midrash, that the brothers did not set out to tend only the sheep, thus solely for the purpose of honoring their father, rather they were intent on tending to themselves. They were interested in a self-serving outing, one that involved eating and drinking, without the service of their father in mind.

The question is simple. How does the Medrash know that from the extra word es and the dots above it? Maybe the extra word and the dots imply that they had an extra mission to fulfill? Maybe it implies sheep and other cattle, thus the extra es. Where does it imply that they were not fulfilling their father's will, rather they were fulfilling their own agenda?

The Gemara (Bava Kama 50a) relates that once there lived a man known as Nechunia the Well Digger. Nechunia selflessly dug wells to provide water for the pilgrims, who traveled to Jerusalem for the three pilgrimage festivals, Pesach, Sukkos and Shavuos. It happened once that Nechunia's daughter fell into a deep well that he had dug. People ran to the great tzadik, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, who was known for his miraculous ability to intercede on behalf of those in distress, and asked him to pray for the child. It seemed that he was not the least bit concerned. During the first hour he said to them, "Don't worry, she will be all right." An hour later, when there was still no sign of the girl, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa still seemed unperturbed. "She still is fine," he said. During the third hour, he told those who had come to him "do not worry, she has come out of the well already." When they asked the girl, "Who brought you up?" she replied, "A ram materialized, and an old man was leading it." After hearing this, the people asked Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa, "What made you so sure that she would be saved? Are you a prophet?" Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa replied, "I am not a prophet, nor am I the student of a prophet. But I said to myself, it is impossible that a deep well, one that the tzadik Nechunia the Well Digger took so much pain to dig in order to quench the thirst of travelers, would be a pitfall for one of his children! I felt it would be impossible for his child to be harmed by his good deed. Therefore I knew she would be safe."

The Midrash used simple logic. If the brothers' intent was solely to honor and service their father by tending his sheep, then that mission could never have produced the consequences that brought Yaakov misery for 22 years. How is it possible that an exercise in parental honor would turn into an activity that would cause such parental grief and anguish? Therefore, those two dots that hover over the extra word contain a powerful message. Tainted acts cause tainted results. If the mission is pure, so are the results, and when we see sullied circumstances then we must assume tainted intent. However, when brothers act out of purity of purpose and with a non-tainted mission, then their intent will only bring honor to Heaven.

The Power of an Iota of Jealousy

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

In this week's parsha we learn of one of the most problematic stories in the Torah -- the sale of Yosef by his brothers. We are paying for the dissension that existed in the Jewish people, which led to brother selling brother into slavery, until this very day. If we wonder why there is such constant dissension and division amongst us, it is because of the seeds that were sown on that fateful day.

It must be stated at the outset that in no way shape or form can we liken our petty disputes to the division that separated the brothers. We sometimes fight over terribly trivial things. We are ordinary people. The brothers were righteous pillars of the world. They are the foundation of our nation. We must never be guilty of superimposing our pettiness on the founders of the Tribes. Our Sages take pains to explain the nature of the situation between Yosef and his brothers. The approach is that the brothers deemed Yosef to have the status of a 'Rodef' [a pursuer bent on murder] and as such, they sat as a formal court that deliberated and sentenced Yosef to death and subsequently sold him. This was done because their best understanding of the situation was that Yosef presented a clear and present danger to the family.

In spite of all this, the Sages are troubled by the fact that the brothers made such a tragic mistake. There are not so many people in Jewish history who were given the title "HaTzadik" [the righteous one]. How could the brothers view one of their own flesh and blood, who was in fact righteous, as a potential threat?

The Sages point to the verse "And the brothers saw that their father loved him more than all the brothers and they hated him" [Bereshis 37:4]. The situation resulted from at least an iota, a drop, of jealousy. The Talmud advises that a father should never show even the slightest amount of favoritism between children because the perceived favoritism that Yaakov showed to Yosef ultimately led to our exile in Egypt [Shabbos 10b].

The following are the words of Rav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, the Telshe Rosh Yeshiva, zt"l: The Torah teaches us that the first seed of the mistake of the brothers flowed from a very natural human trait. In spite of the fact that these human beings reached great heights and purity of spirit, nevertheless their human traits were submerged deep inside their consciousness to the extent that they did not realize that they were there. They thought they were making a perfectly impartial judgment. We see from here how powerful nature's rule is, even over the greatest of people.

We thus see that even an iota of jealousy, in even a great person, can impact his ability to judge even a capital case. The practical lesson for us is clear. We may believe that we are thinking something through and we may believe that we are acting purely with the best intentions and for the Sake of G-d [l'Shem Shamayim]. But we as human beings must always question our motives. We are subject to feelings of jealousy, of questing for honor, and of the whole range of human emotions and character traits. Therefore we must remain on guard.

Rabbi Zev Leff quotes the following Talmudic incident [Brochos 28b]: When Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai was deathly ill, his students came in to visit him. When he saw them he started to cry. They said to him "Candle of Israel, the Right Hand Pillar, the almighty hammer, why are you crying?" Rav Yochanan ben Zakai responded, "If they would be taking me before a mortal judge that is here today and gone tomorrow; who if he would be angry at me, it would only be for a small amount of time; if he tortures or kills me it is not permanent suffering; I would nevertheless cry (in trepidation). Certainly now that they are taking me before the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed Be He who Lives forever, whose Anger is an eternal anger, and if he tortures me it will be eternal torture, and if he kills me it will be eternal death - should I not cry?"

But the question must be asked, was Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai -- who was one of the greatest Tanaim -- really worried that G-d would kill him with eternal death? Was he really worried that he may deserve the punishment of Kares -- being cut off from any reward in the Afterworld? The sins that result in such punishment are clearly not transgressions that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai ever came close to violating. So is the meaning of this Gemara?

Rav Zev Leff suggests that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai was worried about a single incident in his life that really bothered him. He knew that he was a pious Jew. He knew that he put on Tephillin. He knew that he kept the Torah. That did not bother him. He was worried about the following incident. The Gemara [Gittin 56b] states that before the Beis Hamikdash [Temple] was destroyed, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai was given the opportunity to ask the future Roman Caesar for a wish. Jerusalem was under siege and the Beis Hamikdash hung in the balance. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai was told to make a wish and he would be granted whatever he wished. The Gemara relates that he asked for three things: He asked that the Yeshiva in Yavneh and its Sages be spared; he asked that the House of Rabban Gamliel be spared; and he asked for medical care for a sage named Rav Tzadok. He was granted all three wishes.

The Gemara there asks the obvious question -- why didn't he ask that the Beis Hamikdash be spared? This question was discussed in the Talmud many years later. Some say that he was afraid to ask for the Beis Hamikdash, because he knew that they would not grant such a request. The conclusion of the Gemara however is that he made a mistake. Why did he make a mistake? G-d wanted the Beis Hamikdash destroyed. Through Divine Providence, G-d removed Rav Yochanan ben Zakai's insight to ask for the Beis Hamikdash at that moment.

Now, as Rabbi Yochanan was about to die and he looked back over his lifetime, he recognized that the most crucial decision of his lifetime was his requests to the Roman general. "Maybe I should have asked for the Beis Hamikdash, but I did not. Maybe the reason why I did not ask for the Beis Hamikdash was for personal reasons.

There was an internal struggle within the Jewish people at that time. There were great disagreements and strife between the elders of the community and the group called the 'Biryonim' [young Turks]. The Biryonim wanted to fight against the Romans. The Biryonim thought that they could prevail. Rav Yochanan ben Zakai told them that they were crazy. They would never be able to prevail. Rav Yochanan argued that we should try to make peace. (In fact, the Talmud relates that they had enough provisions to hold out for 21 years but the Biryonim destroyed all the storage of grain and wood - to force the Jews to fight). History proved Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai to be right. The Jews lost when they fought the Romans. The Beis Hamikdash was destroyed. But, now on his deathbed, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai was analyzing his motives in not asking for the Beis HaMikdash to be spared. "Maybe I did not ask for the Beis HaMikdash because I wanted history to prove me right in my argument against the Biryonim. Perhaps, subconsciously, it was my desire for the honor of being borne out by history that caused me to not ask for the Beis Hamikdash. Maybe it was a personal motive." If my decision was colored by personal motives then I lost the Beis Hamikdash for the Jewish people! Then I will be deserving of Eternal punishment at the Hand of G-d. That is why I am crying and that is why I am afraid.

The point is that even if someone is on the level of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai, he still needs to ask himself some basic questions: Were my motives pure? Were my intentions proper? Did I make a mistake? Did my personal involvement ("negius") color my decision? It can happen to anyone. This, says Reb Eliya Meir Bloch, was the downfall of the brothers. This was not gross and coarse sibling rivalry, but a minuscule amount of jealousy. Sometimes that is all that it takes to color a perception and to color a decision to the extent that they could feel that Yosef was out to get them and as such they could feel justified in condemning him to death. Even the greatest of human beings - even the Tribes of G-d - are unfortunately prone to the pitfalls and foibles of all mankind. They are subject to be influenced by things like jealousy, lust, and honor that can drive a person from the world [Avos 4:21].

Mysterious Events

By Rabbi Berel Wein

Life generally and Jewish life particularly, is unpredictable, surprising, mysterious and enigmatic. Yaakov expects that after his encounter with Lavan and Eisav the worst is behind him. But the fun is just about to begin. Who could predict that after the sibling controversies between Yishmael and Yitzchak, Yaakov and Eisav that the greatest sibling controversy in Jewish history would now begin?

All sorts of mysterious and inexplicable events conspire to bring this story along. Why does Yaakov give Yosef a special tunic and show such favoritism in front of his other children? Why does he send Yosef on such an apparently dangerous mission to find his brothers? Who is the mysterious man that leads into the lair of Shimon and Levi? And why is the final result of all of this the sale of Yosef as a slave destined for Egyptian bondage?

Later in the parsha, how does Yehuda commit such an apparently immoral act and why is he nevertheless rewarded as being the ancestor of Jewish royalty and messianic destiny? And why does Peretz push his way out of his mother's womb ahead of Zerach?

The Torah grants us no answers to any of these fantastic events. Midrash offers various comments and interpretations to help us somewhat understand this chain of events. But at the end of the story, it all remains one great enigma wrapped in heavenly mystery. I am very poor at solving mysteries or explaining very difficult, complex torah issues and biblical narrative. Therefore I content myself with observing in wonder the story that the Torah relates to us.

The prophet Yeshayahu taught us that God's ways are not our ways and that his guiding hand in all human affairs remains invisible, mysterious and most wondrous. This is the basic thrust of how Jewish tradition viewed not only Biblical narrative but all of Jewish and human history.

In our time the Holocaust was unforeseen unbelievable and even after its occurrence it is still subject to denial by millions of people. Who could have imagined a Jewish state emerging in the Land of Israel against internal and external odds, expectations and predictions? And how, after millennium of Torah tradition and ritual observance would that State bring forth as an apparent bastion of secularism and even atheism? Yet all of this has happened, and the wonders of Jewish life continue to expand before our very eyes. Israel has become much more of a Jewish state than a socialist one. Anti-Semitism has never been stronger and yet the Jewish people have never felt as emboldened and strong as it is today.

The enormous rebirth of Torah scholarship and study within the Jewish people the world over and especially here in Israel is perhaps the greatest surprise of our time. All of this should make us wary of expert predictions, all-knowing politicians and other savants who claim to know our future and what is really in our best interests. Mysteries of the parsha are themselves the message of the parsha.

“His brothers saw that it was he whom their father loved most of all his brothers so they hated him; and they were not able to speak to him peaceably” (37:4)

Why does the posuk say that the brothers saw that Yaakov loved Yosef more than all his brothers? The Meshech Chochma explains that at first the brothers thought that Yaakov had a special love for sons of Rachel, his beloved wife. When they saw that the special love was only for Yosef and not Binyamin, then they hated him. They thought that Yaakov loved Yosef because of the derogatory reports that Yosef brought back to their father about them. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch writes that we see how terrible things can happen when we do not judge others favorably. When Yosef saw his brothers acting in a way that he felt was improper, he should have judged them favorably and not immediately jumped to the conclusion that they were acting inappropriately. If he would have done so, his brothers would not have hated him. Not judging others favorably can damage relationships and break up families. The Gemara in Shabbos 127b says that judging favorably is part of the mitzva of bringing peace between a man and his friend. This is one of the mitzvos for which one receives reward in both this world and the next. One cannot judge people with an attitude that he has been wronged by them. One must assume that there is always something more to the situation and that the other person really does not mean him harm. This is how we must approach our relationships with our fellow Jews. It is an obligation to attribute things to other causes and not to assume that they are trying to harm us. We should be careful not misinterpret situations because it can lead to disastrous results. This is an important lesson to learn from this week's parsha.

“Reuven said to them: Shed no blood! Throw him into this pit in the wilderness, but lay no hand upon him! - intending to rescue him from their hand, to return him to his father” (37:22)

In the Gemara in Makkos 10a, R' Tanchum bar Chanilai asks why the ir miklat (city of refuge for one who commits an accidental murder) in Reuven's territory was listed first among the arei miklat (Devarim 4:43). He answers that because Reuven made the first attempt to save Yosef, his city of refuge, which served the purpose of saving people, is listed first in the Torah. The lesson to learn from this is that when we do a mitzvah, our readiness to jump in is also important. We should learn from Reuven and be the one to step up to the plate when the situation calls for it. It is very difficult to be the first to do anything, but there is a great reward for having the courage to take the first step. This knowledge should be an inspiration to us. Every minute aspect of the manner in which a person acts is repaid in kind. The way in which Reuven did a mitzvah was repaid 272 years later when Moshe set up the cities of refuge east of the Yarden. Even the small nuances of how we fulfill the mitzvos will be rewarded. We cannot know if the reward will come directly to us or to future generations, nor can we know for certain the exact form that the reward will come in. What we can be assured of is that Hashem will reward us and that the reward will correspond to the mitzvos that we do and the attitude that we take toward them.

“At that time, Yehuda descended from his brothers and pitched his tent by an Adullamite man whose name was Chirah” (38:1)

Why does the posuk say that Yehuda “went down from among his brothers” rather than say that he left them? Rashi comments that after seeing Yaakov's pain after Yosef's disappearance, Yehuda's brothers demoted him from his leadership position because he had been the one who advised them to sell Yosef. Had he said otherwise, they would have listened to him and brought him home. We all have influence on certain people around us and if we do not use it to help them improve, we will be held accountable. Each of us should ask ourselves: How can I make a difference in someone else's life? How can I positively impact people and help them better serve Hashem? One of the curses that was pronounced on Har Eival when the Jewish people entered Eretz Yisrael was “cursed is he who does not uphold the words of this Torah.” Ramban explains that this is a reference to people who are able to use their influence to improve others but do not. Having influence is significant responsibility which we should make sure to use wisely.

“His master saw that Hashem was with him and that Hashem made all that he did succeed in his hand” (39:3)

How did Yosef's master know that Hashem was with him? Rashi explains that he always heard the name of Hashem on Yosef's lips. He understood that this connection to Hashem was the key to Yosef's success. Yosef's experience in Egypt set an example for what it means to be a Jew in exile. Despite going from one difficulty to the next, he did not hide his religion. He was a proud Jew and everyone knew it because he always mentioned the name of Hashem. That is how a Jew can succeed in an environment that challenges his connection to Hashem. Instead of abandoning religion, we should be careful to keep Hashem front and center in our lives and He will grant us success. Hiding our beliefs and trying to fit in with the people around us will not help us be more successful. The Torah later repeats that “he was in the house of his Egyptian master” to emphasize that Yosef never forgot that he was not in his natural environment. He reminded himself not to try to blend in or adapt to the local culture, but to remain proud of who he was and not be too ashamed to be true to himself even in a foreign land.

Freudian Slip "Up"

By Sheldon Stern

IMHO, the sale of Yosef by his brothers stands as the single most exasperating story in the Torah. In the previous Parsha, we're told that despite Reuvein's apparent indiscretion all 12 sons were perfect Tzaddikim yet they could perpetrate such a heinous act. Moreover, the sale is actually juxtaposed to the Torah's statement that they were 12 brothers. It only digresses to enumerate Eisav's descendants. The Midrash tells us that when Paroah had his fateful dreams his savants offered interpretations but none appealed to him. Similarly there are any number of Divrei Torah which try to make sense of the sale, but they're ultimately unsatisfying. This past Shabbos I noticed something in the verses and I had an epiphany. As Steppenwolf sang, "Why don't you come along with me on this magic carpet ride?"

Genesis 37:3 states that Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons because he was his child of old age(however that's understood.) But the next verse says that when Yosef's brothers saw that their father loved Yosef more than them they hated him. Ok. Seemingly a simple case of sibling rivalry on speed. But let's examine the Hebrew version of verse four. Vayiru Echav(Yosef's brothers saw) Ki Oso Ahav Avihem(that their father loved him(Yosef) Mikal Echav(from all his sons). But Echav doesn't mean sons it means brothers. This was a classic Freudian slip. The brothers were so consumed with hatred for Yosef they lost track of the family relationship. Yes they were brothers but they were also Yaakov's sons the vaunted Shvtei Kah. You can be sure that our Patriarch constantly drummed this into them. But because they were focused on their role as brothers they viewed Yosef as an interloper who would cast them out. This made them capable of not only killing a brother, but perhaps even more shocking, breaking their father's heart.

So how did it happen? There are nine Supreme Court justices and they weigh in on the nation's critical issues. Each one is a scholar nonpareil but at the end of the day the jurists who are of conservative bent rule accordingly and the same for the liberals. Why so? Don't they analyze the facts and make a decision based on their best understanding of the Constitution? Ah nechtege tug. Dylan wrote, "We all see the same things we just start out from a different point of view." The brothers were coming from a place of anger, of conflict and so they couldn't come to a truthful decision. When they convened a Bes Din it was simply to confirm their already arrived at conclusion. Sure they had evidence against him, but there was far more to support a favorable outcome but they had no interest in those factors. Let's see how that works. When a person(people) set a course for discord they invite the Yetzer hora into their bodies and become its slave. We can appreciate this by considering how viruses infect their prey. Amazingly viruses cannot exist outside the host organism but when they invade they inject their DNA into the victim's cells and they take control of them. In effect, these viruses own the host and he's totally unaware. And that's how the Yetzer hora operates. He allows the person to continue functioning or to think they're functioning. And so the brothers Davened with Minyan three times a day. They ate glatt kosher. They kept everything. So they were convinced of their frumkeit. But they had no idea that the virus of dissension was gnawing at them and would have ultimately destroyed them had Hashem not stepped in.

And we shouldn't think that this was an isolated event to be shrugged off. Twice a year, on Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av, we read about the horrific killings of the Ten Martyrs. Were those Tannaim gigulim of the brothers? I don't know but our Sages sent a message that can't be lost on us. Hashem has never forgotten how perfect Tzaddikim could lose their way and be totally unaware of their Rishus. Rabbi Miller famously attributed the Holocaust to Chillul Shabbos. It might have been a factor. Maybe even a significant factor, but the thought of Torah Jews mistreating other Torah Jews is the ultimate Chillul Hashem, because it teaches us that people imbued with Torah and Mitzvos are nonetheless capable of acting terribly. A few weeks ago something caught my eye on VIN. The Satmar Rebbe was trying to intercede and "force" a Tosher Chassid to give a Get to his estranged wife who's been an Agunah for the last ten years(her ex remarried with a Heter Meah Rabbanim).I spoke to someone who knows the real story and I won't take sides Rather the point I want to bring out is that the Rebbe brokered a deal in which both sides agreed to come to the table. The husband had the Get with him and the wife's father was prepared to pay his ex son-in-law's demands. Sounds good. But at the last moment the husband backed off. Why? Maybe a family member told him to hold out for more money. This is the power of Machlokes. The husband is probably a decent fellow. The father-in-law is a superrich Satmar so he likely gives massive amounts of Tzedaka. But their Yetzer horas keep the fires of hatred burning. If we only understood how much Hashem hates such strife it would end post-haste. But we don't understand and we don't care and that's why we're still in Galus.

Reaching Out to Those in Need

by Rabbi Avraham Kovel

From favored son to imprisoned slave. From prophetic dreamer to forgotten prisoner. When Joseph lost everything, he discovered what his dreams never showed him: the true meaning of Jewish leadership.

At the beginning of this week's Torah portion, we find Joseph grooming himself, sharing prophetic dreams of ruling over his family, and parading a striking coat that broadcasts "daddy's favorite." His self-absorption, dreams of grandeur, and flaunting of favoritism provoke his brothers' anger. They throw him into a pit and subsequently sell him to spice merchants bound for Egypt.

In Egypt, the merchants sell Joseph as a slave to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's chamberlains. But after rising to power in Potiphar's house, Joseph fails the test yet again. According to Rashi, "As soon as he saw that he was ruler (in the house) he began to eat and drink and curl his hair." God's response? "Your father is mourning and you curl your hair! I will let a bear loose against you."

That "bear" arrives in the form of Potiphar's wife, who sets her sights on the handsome young steward. After failing in her final seduction attempt, she has Joseph thrown in jail on a false charge of attempted rape.

After 12 years rotting in an Egyptian dungeon, Joseph faces another test. This time, his response reveals a profound transformation - not through grand gestures, but through an act so small we might dismiss it as trivial.

In the deepest pit of Egypt's most depraved culture, Joseph - a boy betrayed by his brothers and imprisoned on false charges - does something remarkable. Noticing two imprisoned courtiers of Pharaoh, he performs a simple act of kindness: "When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were distraught. He asked, 'Why do you appear downcast today?'" (Genesis 40:6-7). Rabbeinu Bachya explains: "Joseph cared for their well-being although they were wicked people serving a wicked King."

The timing of this gesture is astounding. Joseph's life lies in ruins. He's been imprisoned without hope of release for 12 years. When we're at our lowest, caring for others feels almost impossible - our pain demands all our attention, pulling us into self-centered despair. Yet these moments of heartbreak offer us something precious: the ability to truly relate to another's suffering.

Through his own pain, Joseph discovers the meaning of Jewish leadership - the capacity to step beyond ourselves and connect with another's struggles. This is the legacy of Moses, whom the Torah describes as the most humble person who ever lived (Numbers 12:3). As the saying goes, humility isn't thinking less of yourself – it's thinking of yourself less.

Joseph's childhood dreams of kingship weren't mere fantasy - they were prophecies awaiting fulfillment. Like a seed that must break down in dark soil before it can sprout, Joseph's ego needed crushing before true leadership could emerge. The pit and the prison served as God's crucible, transforming his self-absorption into selfless concern. The simple act of genuine concern for two troubled prisoners marks the moment Joseph's true leadership emerges.

As within, so without. Joseph's inner transformation quickly manifests in the outer world. After interpreting the courtiers' dreams, one returns to his post and mentions Joseph's abilities to Pharaoh, triggering his ascent from dungeon to throne.

Our sages teach that our forefathers' actions create spiritual blueprints for future generations. If Joseph's redemption began when he reached beyond his own suffering to care for others, then the Torah is teaching us about how to achieve redemption from the pits of our own lives. We must not wallow in our own pain. We must realize that we're not needy - we're needed.

This week, pay attention to the needs of those around you. Look for someone who seems downcast. Push yourself beyond your own concerns to see their pain. Offer a smile, open a conversation. In doing so, you are sowing the seeds of redemption – seeds of the perfected, harmonious world we all hope to build.