

Mature Consciousness

פ"ד

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Parshat Miketz

Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. (Genesis 42:8)

Why did they not recognize him? The most traditional explanation is that he was but a lad of seventeen when they sold him into slavery; it was now twenty years later, and he was a mature man of thirty-seven; he had changed so much in his appearance that they could not recognize him. But there is another interpretation.

The brothers' failure to recognize Joseph represents a spiritual and psychological issue as much as a physical issue. They did not recognize him because it never occurred to them that (a) he would still be alive or (b) if alive, he could possibly have risen to so high a position. They could, perhaps, have accepted Joseph's having survived and having remained a slave, perhaps even a well-placed slave, but they could not imagine that he would rise to become the virtual ruler over all Mitzrayim. Thus, his position being so far from their concept of reality, they did not recognize him. As the *Tur* (42:8) explains, "They didn't recognize him at all because it never occurred to them that Joseph could achieve such success."

But why were they unable to conceive of Joseph's having risen to so high a position? One explanation may be found a few chapters later, after the death of Jacob. When the brothers, fearing Joseph's revenge, send a messenger to him to plead for them in their father's name, he replies (Genesis 50:20), **You may have thought to do me harm, but G*d turned it to good, and the result was the saving of many lives.**

Despite his having lived in Mitzrayim for almost four decades (twenty-two years before Jacob and the rest of the family came to join him in Mitzrayim and seventeen

years since then), Joseph maintained an awareness of G*d's Presence in the events of his life. Indeed, it may well be that it was only in Mitzrayim that he developed that awareness, for we do not read of his invoking G*d before his imprisonment. Had his brothers developed that same awareness, his explanation would have been unnecessary. And, had Joseph's brothers developed that awareness, they would, when they first came to Mitzrayim, have recognized in the viceroy the brother whom they had sold into slavery two decades earlier. It was, thus, their lack of faith that kept them from "recognizing" Joseph.

In a certain sense, this explanation is one with the traditional interpretation. If we understand the traditional explanation – Joseph had matured from the teenager he was when they sold him into slavery – on a spiritual level, we may see that Joseph's maturation is what brought him to his awareness of G*d's Presence. It was not that the brothers were "already adults" when they sold him off; they were still – even though they were fathers and grandfathers – not yet mature adults; they had not attained the maturity that would enable them to recognize G*d's Presence in the events of their lives, and they were therefore unable to recognize their brother who had reached that level. They did not recognize him because they and he were living on radically different levels of consciousness!

And this also explains Joseph's tears of which we are told in Genesis 43:30 – explains it far better than does the traditional explanation (that Joseph wept tears of joy at being re-united with his full brother Benjamin). Joseph realized how far his brothers were from the maturity that could bring them to an awareness of G*d's Presence; how could he fail to weep!

To the mature consciousness that will enable us to be aware of G*d's Presence in all the events of our lives – those which we would choose as well as those which we would not choose – may we speedily be brought.

Shabbat Shalom.

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