

The Revealing of Yosef to his Brothers

Revised 5-22-03

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“Then Yosef said to his brothers, “Please come near to me.” And when they came near, he said, “I am Yosef your brother, whom you have sold into Mitsrayim.” Bereshith 45:4

The climax in the story of Yosef and his Yisraelite brothers comes after along speech in which Yehudah volunteers himself to remain in Egypt as Yosef’s slave—thereby accepting that he is atoning for his role in selling Yosef into slavery. After Yehudah makes his gracious offer to Yosef the Scriptures says, “Yosef was unable to restrain himself.” (**Bereshith 45:1**). It was ONLY after Yehudah, because of his love for his father –Yisrael, offers himself as atonement for the brothers’ sin that Yosef tearfully reveals himself to his brothers: “I AM YOSEF.”

Yosef’s brethren are completely dumbfounded, until Yosef tells them to approach and come nearer and THEN he REPEATS: “I AM YOUR BROTHER YOSEF.” He then reminds them how they sold him and speaks of their father –Yisrael. He then concludes by saying to them: “And LOOK, your eyes and the eyes of my brother Binyamin SEE that it is my mouth that speaks to you.”

There is a threefold attempt by Yosef to prove his identity to his brothers. This must mean that there was some distrust on the part of the other brothers about what he was telling them. They had sent a teen-ager into Egypt and now are looking at a 39-year-old man in Egyptian clothing. Why should they trust this Mitzrite, who had already treated them so cruelly? Just because this man could quote the story of their brother’s captivity could not prove to them he WAS Yosef! It is possible their lost brother had told his story to an Egyptian, and from there it was being told by this man standing before them claiming to be their brother. And how would Yosef PROVE to his brothers that he truly was their brother Yosef, a lost Yisraelite?

In the Aramaic translation attributed to Yonatan ben Uziel, the verse that says, “It is I who am speaking to you” is rendered this way: “I am speaking to you in the holy tongue.” Until now, Yosef had spoken to them through an interpreter, with no indication that he understood Hebrew at all. The very same Aramaic text renders “Come forward to me” as: “Come closer and see my circumcision.”

If you recall in the book *The Odyssey* by Homer there is a scene that is reminiscent of this story. Odysseus comes home and only his old nursemaid can identify him after she washes his feet and sees a childhood scar on his leg. What we see here is the same share motif in these two stories of a hidden bodily sign (*OT*) that confirms their identity.

It is clear that the early sages and rabbis regarded *brit milah* (circumcision) and the *lashan hakodesh* (Holy Tongue) of Hebrew as signs that would identify fellow Yisraelites within a foreign country and a very hostile world. In the Hellenistic-ROMAN pagan world (where we get most our culture and religion, which they obtained from the Greeks), non-Yisraelites regarded circumcision as a barbaric unholy mutilation of the males natural state (since they worshipped the body as Romans chapter 1 describes) and disgusting. Also, must assuredly only the Yisraelites or Yehudim spoke Hebrew. To these two signs of Yisraelite heritage we can add one that the Torah itself let Yosef use to identify himself to his brothers and use: knowing the family history and all its past.

The Hebrew language, circumcision, and the intimate knowledge of a shared history and past were among the Yisraelites identity badge in the ancient world, but not open ones. The dress seen could reflect the fashion of the *goyim* (as with Yosef), and language reveals that truth only when spoken. One may appear to look like one of the nations, but body parts hidden by modest dress reveals ones true identity and roots. The present is shared with the general society; but history points to ones true uniqueness. Anyone who wishes to be absorbed or assimilated into the accepted society or culture can conceal the fact that he is circumcised, avoid the use of Hebrew, and not speak of your families past history. **BUT THE SIGNS ARE THERE AND AVAILABLE WHEN IT COMES TIME TO REVEAL YOUR TRUE IDENTITY TO YOUR BROTHERS AS PART OF YISRAEL AND OF THE SEED OF AVRAHAM! These are the signs that the brothers will be looking for in their lost brethren. They then knew that this HAD to really be Yosef that had been sold into slavery by these signs he showed them.**

THE SYMBOLISM HERE GOES EVEN DEEPER: Circumcision is an example of keeping the 613 Torah commands given by Yahweh to ALL 12 tribes of Israel; Hebrew stands for the shared culture, liturgy and worship; the family's past stands for a national history of a Kingdom. And so Yosef, the Yisraelite brother LOST and REGAINED, points us to the three strands of shared identity for the people of Yisrael's future reunion in **Yechezqel 37**:

- “And they shall no longer defile themselves with their idols, nor their disgusting matters, nor with any of their transgressions, and I shall save them from their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and I shall cleanse them. And they shall be My people, and I shall be their Elohim.”
Yechezqel 37:23

May Yahweh bless your understanding of these signs of Yosef found in the Torah!
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