
THE COMMUNICATION OF REVELATION

GENESIS 45

GIVE ME A LIFETIME - PART 10



“In the thousands of years since Torah was given, Judah’s actions have served as the prototype of true repentance (In Hebrew, teshuvah). When a person has done an evil act, he should do all within his power to undo the evil. But even then how can a person know if he really has transformed himself? As in Judah’s case, he gets an opportunity to repeat the same sin with Benjamin and refuses it. Judah, the brother who once advocated selling Joseph into slavery, now is prepared to become a slave to save another brother from the same fate. Judah’s noble offer convinces Joseph that his test has gone far enough; because his brothers have truly changed, he can now reveal himself.” (Telushkin)

MANY FAMILIES ARE BESET WITH TENSIONS AND CONFLICTS THAT SOMETIMES LEAD SIBLINGS, PARENTS, AND CHILDREN, TO STOP SPEAKING WITH EACH OTHER. THE CAUSE OF THE FIGHTS IS ALMOST ALWAYS FAR LESS UGLY THAN BROTHERS SELLING OFF ONE OF THEIR OWN INTO SLAVERY. IF JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS CAN RECONCILE AND LEARN TO COMMUNICATE, THE BIBLE IS TEACHING US, WHY CAN'T WE?

MAIMONIDES, MISHNEH TORAH, "LAWS OF REPENTANCE," 2:1

What is the Reward of Repentance?

- *Communication*

What is the Result of Repentance?

- *Revelation*

"God is the first object of our love. Its next office is to bear the defects of others. And we should begin the practice of this amid our own household."

John Wesley

Key verse

"And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren." (45:1)

Key verse

“Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 45:5-8; NASB)

45:3 “I am Joseph (Yosef) Is it true that my father is still alive?”

The Hebrew word used to describe the brothers' reactions is נִבְּהָלוּ nivhalu (great fear).

The brothers were frightened at this revelation. The text further shows them to be afraid that Joseph (Yosef) might take retribution (cf. Gen. 50:15, 18).

45:26–27 He was stunned at the news.

אֲפֹרַיִם Although Jacob (Ya'akov) was surprised to learn that Joseph (Yosef) was alive, he “began to revive” at some point in this sequence of events. The wording literally notes that “his heart became weak.” It is logical to surmise that the text is telling us that Jacob (Ya'akov) fainted and then gained consciousness afterward.

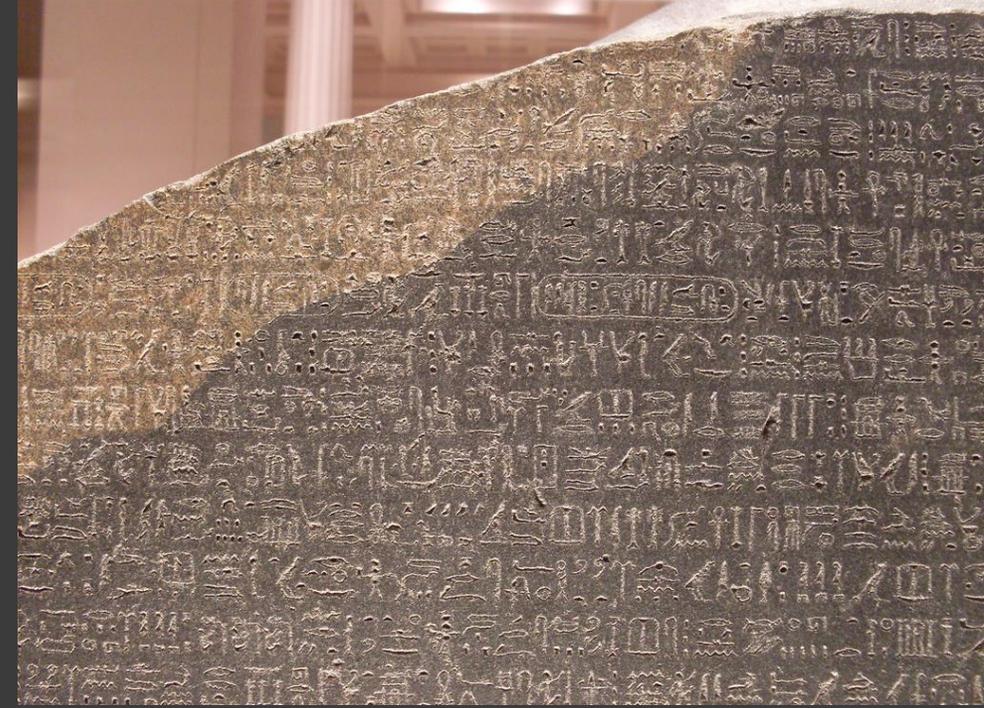
Footnote 1:

Land of Goshen. This is normally believed to have been in the area of the Wadi Tumilat in the eastern part of the Nile Delta, well known for being rich in pasturelands. The Egyptian document Papyrus Anastasi VI describes Pharaoh Merenptah (c. 1220 BC) allowing Edomites to settle in Goshen to “keep themselves and their flocks alive in the territory of the king.”

Footnote 2:

Cracking Hieroglyphics: The Rosetta Stone

In AD 1798, Napoleon invaded Egypt. Along with his troops, the monarch brought a scientific expedition of scholars, architects, and draftsmen whose duty was to survey the ancient monuments of Egypt. The expedition made a number of important discoveries, but none as great as the famous Rosetta Stone. This was an invaluable find because it was the key to unlocking the written pictographic language of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics. The stone dated to the period of King Ptolemy V (204–180 BC), and was inscribed in three scripts: Greek, Demotic, and hieroglyphics. The Greek text proved to be a translation of the two ancient Egyptian languages on the stone. The deciphering was done by two scholars, Thomas Young and Jean-François Champollion. The key to unlocking the hieroglyphs on the stone was the appearance of cartouches. A cartouche is an oval frame enclosing a royal name; by knowing the royal names in Greek, the translators were able to decipher the hieroglyphs within the cartouche. The decipherment of hieroglyphics opened up the highly civilized culture of ancient Egypt to Europe, and thus the Rosetta Stone became one of the great discoveries in the history of archaeology.



FOOTNOTE 3:

ESSAY: GOD AND FREE WILL

45.5 Now do not be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me hither; it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you.

Now that Joseph believed his brothers truly regretted what they had done to him, he told them they were not ultimately responsible for what they did—they were actors in the divine drama that led to his prominence in Egypt.

This raises one of life's most important questions: How much free will do we have? Religious people who believe in divine intervention—such as Joseph describes here—need to address this question. Atheists have an answer: human beings do not have free will. If, as atheists contend, we are only material beings, like the stellar dust of which we are composed, we cannot have free will. As matter doesn't make choices, neither do we. Everything we do is determined by our genes and by neurons firing according to scientific principles. For the atheist, the assertion that human beings have free will is wishful thinking and self-delusion. Human beings are essentially rocks with self-consciousness and therefore have no more free will than rocks. Here is the atheist position on free will as described in *The Humanist* by a prominent contemporary atheist thinker:

There's a desperate charm to that idea [free will] but we're quite beyond it now. The mechanisms of decision making, the chemistry of empathy, the physics of neural plasticity, each gnaws away every day at the few remaining supports of a free-will model of individuality. We are forced to either redefine free will to something existent but meaningless or chuck the idea altogether and make peace with finding the subtle joys of our exquisite programmability. (DeBasky, Dale, *New Humanist: Do we have free will? The atheist case for determinism*, June 23, 2015)

But this position makes sense only in the abstract. When any of us—atheists, believers, agnostics—think about it, the idea we have no more free will than a rock strikes us as absurd. If you decide to forego dessert to keep your weight down, is that decision entirely programmed? Do students who cheat on tests have no choice but to do so? Are we to believe that no one who does good and no one who does evil is in any way responsible for what they do?

If we do believe these things, all discussion of good and evil is meaningless—calling a person or an act evil is no more meaningful than calling the earth evil after an earthquake. And moral instruction is pointless—we'll respond to such instruction as we are programmed to—so why teach good and evil? (And if teaching about good and evil does influence people, it means we do have free will.) Finally, if there is no free will, life is pointless; we are all acting out a preprogrammed script we had no hand in writing.

Only if we have non-material consciousness (and/or a soul) can we make decisions that are not entirely determined by genes and environment. Therefore, as ironic as it may sound to a secular person, only a God-based understanding of human life allows for free will.

The problem for believers is how to believe in both divine intervention and free will. If Joseph was right about God leading the brothers to abandon him to his fate in a pit, where was the brothers' free will?

There is no perfect answer because believers are not prepared to abandon either belief in divine intervention or free will. But there are imperfect answers. One is that moral free will and divine providence co-exist, but only God knows precisely how they mesh. Another is most believers recognize God does not always intervene but does so at times of His choosing for His purposes. I find both responses rationally acceptable. In any event, Joseph was magnanimous in telling his brothers not to reproach themselves for what they did to him. But it is quite a bit easier, we must admit, to forgive—and to see God's hand—when things turn out as well as they did for Joseph.

(Prager, Dennis, *The Rational Bible: Genesis, God, Creation, and Destruction* (Washington, DC, Regnery Faith, 2019), 504, 505, 506)