

Davar Torah – Dec. 4, 2021
Shabbat Mikketz/Chanukah/Rosh Hodesh
By Moshe Sherman-Kadish (B'nai Mitzvah)

Shabbat Shalom.

What does it take to forgive someone when you have a good reason to be angry? What can we learn from this parsha about how we're supposed to deal with anger and forgiveness?

In this parsha Joseph has become the second in command to Pharaoh and is in charge of food distribution during a famine. Imagine his surprise when *his brothers* come to him asking for food! The brothers that nearly killed him and caused him to be a slave and a prisoner! What a shock it must be when he sees them!

At first, he pretends not to know who they are. I think he does this in part to protect himself, because he must assume his brothers hate him--and he also may hate them for what they did to him years before. Either way, he's not ready to speak to them as their brother.

Joseph goes through several stages in trying to deal with his anger.

Before he saw his brothers he had tried to forget the awful experiences they'd put him through. The Torah says that Joseph named his first-born Manasseh, meaning, "God has made me forget completely my hardship and my parental home." Though that doesn't mean that he actually forgot, it showed that he *wanted* to forget.

But when he saw his brothers he forgot all about forgetting! He accused them of being spies and had them spend 3 days in jail. He gave them food, sure - but forgiveness was not on the menu.

Instead, Joseph decided to test them to see if they had changed or were just the same as he remembered. He takes the money that his brothers had given him as payment for food and secretly puts it back into their sacks. What will the brothers do with the money when they find it?

The first sign that the brothers have changed is that they return the money, which they think might have been given back in error instead of keeping it.

During this series of tests Joseph cries many times but hides his tears from his brothers. He might be feeling sorrow at the years he's lost with family...but he's not ready to share any of it yet.

Next Joseph tells his brothers to go home to Canaan and bring Benjamin, their fathers other favorite son, back to Egypt with them.

They comply with this request. When Joseph sees Benjamin it really touches him but he continues with one last test. He has a silver goblet planted in Benjamin's sack. He sends his assistant after his brothers and accuses them of stealing, saying they can go freely as long as they leave Benjamin as a slave. Joseph has found a way to replicate the setting of the sin his brothers had committed against him years before!

Moses Maimonides said in the Mishneh Torah, "What constitutes complete repentance? It is when someone faces the same situation where they did the wrong thing but they respond better this time.

And here's where we see that the brothers have truly repented.

Confronted with the prospect of Benjamin becoming a slave and their father having to grieve the loss of another beloved son, Judah offers to stay as a slave so that Benjamin can return to his father. It's interesting that Judah was the same brother who originally had the idea of throwing Joseph into a pit. It's another way Joseph can tell that his brothers have truly changed.

Hearing this, Joseph breaks into tears again - finally so loud that everyone in his household can hear. Only then is he ready to move forward--and he reveals his identity to his brothers.

What is it, exactly, that turns the tide for Joseph?

One possibility is that it happened when he was finally able to cry--to feel sadness and loss instead of just anger.

Another possibility is that Joseph needed time to move past his hurt.

It's also possible it was the results of the tests that let Joseph move on: he saw that his brothers weren't the same cruel people he remembered--this time they did everything right.

And even though we think of revenge as a bad thing, it's also possible Joseph simply couldn't move forward until he'd given his brothers a taste of their own medicine.

However Joseph gets there, this is a story of a successful reconciliation--and that should be a good thing. But the reconciliation is delayed--in fact, the parasha ends without forgiveness. The moment I've described in which Joseph cries out loud doesn't happen until the NEXT parasha.

Sometimes if you wait too long to forgive someone you may never actually get to forgive them or the relationship might be broken beyond repair. We've all experienced moments when we're stuck - we want to make up with someone but we're not ready for it yet. By

showing us how many stages Joseph has to go through in order to forgive--and by letting us feel how uncomfortable and scary that process is--the Torah shows us how hard forgiveness is when someone has treated you poorly.