

(19) "My lord questioned his servants, saying, 'Do you have a father or [another] brother?'

(20) "We said to my lord, 'We have an elderly father [who has] a young boy who was born to him in his old age; his brother has died and he alone remains from his mother, and his father loves him.'

(21) "You said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes upon him.'

(22) "We said to my lord, 'The lad is not able to leave his father, for if he were to leave his father, he (his father) would die.'

(23) "You said to your servants, 'If your youngest brother will not come down with you, you shall never again see my face!'"

YEHUDAH ACCUSES THE VICEROY

Let us consider the following questions:

1. In verse 19, Yehudah told the viceroy, "My lord questioned his servants, saying (לְאָמֹר), 'Do you have a father or [another] brother?'" What did Yehudah mean to imply with the word לְאָמֹר in this sentence?⁸
2. Why did the brothers give such a lengthy answer (verse 20) to the viceroy?
3. What was Yehudah's point in reminding the viceroy that he had told them to bring Binyamin so that he may "set his eyes upon him" (verse 21)?
4. Why did Yehudah recount to Yosef here the entire dialogue they had had regarding Binyamin and Yaakov?⁹

8. According to the Alshich, the word לְאָמֹר usually means that the person being addressed is to convey the words he will hear to someone else.

9. The Alshich asks further why Yehudah did not mention to Yosef all the other unkind things Yosef had done to them: accusing them of being spies (42:9); putting them in jail for three days (42:17); returning their money (thus frightening them

(יט) אֲדַנִּי שָׁאֵל אֶת־עֲבָדָיו לֵאמֹר הֲיִשְׁלַכְּם אָב אוֹ־אֶח.
 (כ) וְנֹאמְרָא אֶל־אֲדָנָי יִשְׁלַנּוּ אָב זָקֵן וְיִלְד זְקָנִים קֶטָן וְאָחִיו מֵת
 וַיִּזְתֶּר הוּא לְבַדּוֹ לְאָמוֹ וְאָבִיו אָהָבוּ.
 (כא) וְתֹאמְרָא אֶל־עֲבָדֶיךָ הוֹרְדָהוּ אֵלַי וְאֲשִׁימָה עֵינַי עָלָיו.
 (כב) וְנֹאמְרָא אֶל־אֲדָנָי לֹא־יִזְכַּל הַנַּעַר לְעַזֵּב אֶת־אָבִיו וְעַזֵּב אֶת־אָבִיו וּמָת.
 (כג) וְתֹאמְרָא אֶל־עֲבָדֶיךָ אִם־לֹא יֵרֵד אָחִיכֶם הַקָּטָן אֶתְכֶם לֹא תִסְפוּן
 לְרֹאוֹת פָּנָי.

A close examination of Yehudah's words (that seemingly simply recount the earlier dialogue between the viceroy and the brothers) will reveal that he is actually accusing the viceroy of a sinister subterfuge, though he does not dare to state it explicitly.

The sons of Yaakov were all very handsome. Yehudah suspected that the viceroy of Egypt was hoping they had a younger brother who was as good-looking as they, and if so, he would try to ensnare that brother into becoming his personal attendant and companion for immoral purposes.¹⁰

Yehudah thought this was why the viceroy had asked them if they have a father or brother.¹¹ Yehudah surmised that when the brothers told him that they did, the viceroy concocted a plot to get Binyamin to Egypt and then frame him for stealing his cup by planting it in his travel bag.

Yehudah was now in a quandary. He knew that he had to

into believing that they would be accused of theft) (42:25); and putting the cup in Binyamin's sack (44:2)? The Alshich does not answer this question explicitly, but his approach appears to be that Yehudah was concentrating solely on freeing Binyamin, so the other points — which had nothing to do with the primary issue at hand — were not relevant. Therefore, he did not mention them.

10. Sexual immorality was commonplace in Egypt and in Canaan in Biblical times. See *Vayikra* 18:3 which introduces the Torah's prohibitions against such behavior.

11. Of course, as the Alshich notes, Yosef's **actual** goal in asking them if they have a father or brother was simply to find out how Yaakov and Binyamin were faring.

speaking up in order to protect Binyamin, but he also worried, “Woe to me if I do that [for how can anyone dare to accuse a viceroy of being a degenerate].” Yehudah solved his dilemma by expressing his accusations through hints rather than directly. When he said, “My lord questioned his servants, saying, ‘Do you have a father or a brother?’” he was accusing the viceroy of mentioning their father first in order to validate his inquiry about the possibility of their having a brother, which was his real interest. One should read Yehudah’s words as if they were transposed: *My lord questioned his servants, “Do you have a father?” [to enable him] to [then] say [לְאָמַר], “Do you have a brother?”* without arousing suspicions of immoral intentions. [This answers Question 1.]¹²

Answer to
Question 1

The brothers’ response to the viceroy’s inquiry contains six reasons why the viceroy should not ask them to bring their youngest brother down to Egypt: (1) “We have an elderly father, and it would be thoughtless of you to demand that the son who is serving him in his old age should leave him; (2) [he has] a ... boy who was born to him in his old age, and his father will suffer great anguish if the fruit of his old age were taken from him; (3) [the boy is still] young; (4) his brother [of the same mother] has died, and since he died while on the road, we have reason to fear that a similar tragedy would befall this one; (5) [that boy] alone remains from his mother, which would multiply the tragedy if something were to happen to him; and (6) and his father loves him, so how can you separate him from his father?” [This answers Question 2.]

Answer to
Question 2

Yehudah continued to speak in veiled language. He quoted the viceroy’s order, “Bring him down to me,” as if to tell Yosef: “We had told you (in the six statements I just mentioned) that Binyamin should not be separated from his father, and you responded by commanding that we do exactly that! If you had

12. In other words, in this particular case, the word לְאָמַר does not have its usual meaning (see footnote 8). Rather, it should be understood as “[to enable the viceroy] to verbalize [a **second** question].”

an honest interest in our family's welfare, you would have said, 'Bring **both** your father and your brother down to me,' Or, you would have offered to support them in Canaan. The fact that you did not do so proves that you were interested only in Binyamin, and you mentioned our father only to conceal your true intent.

"Furthermore, you didn't care about Binyamin's welfare either. For we said we were concerned he might die on the road, and you responded to bring him down anyway and you would set your eyes upon him (i.e., protect him). But how could your offer to watch over Binyamin protect him from harm while he was traveling down to Egypt? You could protect him only after his arrival! This proves that you really did not have in mind either the father's welfare or the son's, only your own desires. [This answers Question 3.]

Answer to
Question 3

"Moreover," Yehudah reminded the viceroy, "even after you commanded us to '*bring him (Binyamin) down to me,*' and we reiterated our fear that separating our father from his youngest son would be tantamount to murdering him, you warned us (verse 23), '*If your youngest brother will not come down with you, you shall never again see my face!*' This, too, clearly showed that you only wanted to indulge your desires and did not care about them at all.

"Now, you may wish to defend yourself by claiming, 'You are right, my true interest is not in your father or your brother. If your father brought you up to be spies, why should I be worried about what happens to him or any of his family? I was only trying to give you the opportunity to prove that you are not spies.'¹³ But the punishment with which you threaten us, that we shall never again be permitted to see your face, belies such a claim, for what kind of punishment is that for spies? You should have said, 'If your youngest brother will not come down with you to me, I shall have you put to death!' Thus, it is clear to me that your real

13. For bringing your brother would prove that you had told me the truth about your family, and I would no longer have reason to doubt your honesty.