

things always happen to me!"³⁷ Then Reuben said to his father, "You may kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my care, and I will return him to you."³⁸ But he said, "My son must not go down with you, for his brother is dead and he alone is left. If he meets with disaster on the journey you are taking, you will send my white head down to Sheol in grief."

43 But the famine in the land was severe.² And when they had eaten up the rations which they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again and procure some food for us."³ But Judah said to him, "The man warned us, 'Do not let me see your faces unless your brother is with you.'⁴ If you will let our brother go with us, we will go down and procure food for you;⁵ but if you will not let him go, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'Do not let me see your faces unless your brother is with you.'⁶ And Israel said, "Why did you serve me so ill as to tell the man that you had another brother?"⁷ They replied, "But the man kept

בְּיָמֵינוּ תִּקְחוּ עָלַי הֲיֵנוּ כְּלֵנָה: ³⁷ וַיֹּאמֶר רְאוּבֵן אֶל־אָבִיו לֵאמֹר אֶת־שְׁנֵי בְנֵי תַמִּית אִם־לֹא אָבִיאֲנֹו אֵלֶיךָ תָּנֶה אֹתוֹ עַל־יָדַי וְאֲנִי אֲשִׁיבֶנּוּ אֵלֶיךָ: ³⁸ וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא־יֵרֵד בְּנֵי עִמְכֶם כִּי־אָחִיו מֵת וְהוּא לְבַדּוֹ נִשְׁאָר וְקִרְאָהוּ אֶסוֹן בְּדֶרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר תִּלְכוּ בָּהּ וְהוֹרַדְתֶּם אֶת־שֵׁיבַתִּי בִּיגוֹן שְׂאוּלָה:

מג וְהָרֵעַב כָּבֵד בְּאֶרֶץ: ² וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר כָּלוּ לֶאֱכֹל אֶת־הַשֶּׁבֶר אֲשֶׁר הֵבִיאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם אָבִיהֶם שְׁבוּ שְׁבַרְדּוֹ לָנוּ מֵעֵט־אֶכָּל: ³ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יְהוּדָה לֵאמֹר הָעֵד הָעֵד בְּנֵי הָאִישׁ לֵאמֹר לֹא־תֵרְאוּ פָנַי בְּלֹתֵי אָחֵיכֶם אִתְּכֶם: ⁴ אִם־יִשְׁלַח מְשַׁלַּח אֶת־אָחִינוּ אִתָּנוּ נִרְדֶּה וְנִשְׁפְּרָה לָךְ אֶכָּל: ⁵ וְאִם־אֵינֶךָ מְשַׁלַּח לֹא נִרְדֶּה כִּי־הָאִישׁ אָמַר אֵלָינוּ לֹא־תֵרְאוּ פָנַי בְּלֹתֵי אָחֵיכֶם אִתְּכֶם: ⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמָה הִרְעַתֶּם לִי לְהַגִּיד לְאִישׁ הָעֵד לְכֶם אָח:

37. Reuben He assumes leadership for the last time.

38. is left That is, from his mother.

disaster on the journey Reuben's self-confidence leaves Jacob unimpressed. Deeply con-

cerned about the perils of the journey, Jacob does not see that Reuben is trying to assure him of an ultimate positive outcome—that the viceroy of Egypt will keep his promise.

THE SECOND JOURNEY TO EGYPT (43:1–34)

Jacob rejects Reuben's plea and offer. But the brothers know that the fear of starvation will ultimately overcome their father's resistance.

2. when they had eaten up There remains only food enough to enable their families to survive while the brothers travel to Egypt and back.

3. Judah He is the spokesman from now on. Reuben is not heard from again, even though he is the firstborn. The incident described in 35:22 shows that he has lost his position of honor in the family.

The man Abbreviated from "the man who

is lord of the land" (42:30,33). Joseph is henceforth called "the man," while the brothers are correspondingly termed "the men." This is an artful device of the narrator as events move toward the climactic moment when Joseph discloses his true identity to his brothers.

7. They replied The report the brothers now give to their father does not correspond to the account of the interrogation in chapter 42, when the brothers seemed to offer unsolicited information about themselves quite freely (vv. 11,13). However, from 44:19 it is clear that Jo-

asking about us and our family, saying, 'Is your father still living? Have you another brother?' And we answered him accordingly. How were we to know that he would say, 'Bring your brother here?'

⁸Then Judah said to his father Israel, "Send the boy in my care, and let us be on our way, that we may live and not die—you and we and our children. ⁹I myself will be surety for him; you may hold me responsible: if I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, I shall stand guilty before you forever. ¹⁰For we could have been there and back twice if we had not dawdled."

¹¹Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, do this: take some of the choice products of the land in your baggage, and carry them down as a gift for the man—some balm

7 וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׂאוֹל שְׂאֵל־הָאִישׁ לָנוּ
וּלְמוֹלְדָנוּ לֵאמֹר הֲעוֹד אֲבִיכֶם חַי הַיֵּשׁ
לְכֶם אָח וְנִגְדְּלוֹ עַל־פִּי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה
הַיְדוּעַ גִּדּוּעַ כִּי יֹאמֶר הוֹרִידוּ אֶת־
אֲחֵיכֶם:

8 וַיֹּאמֶר יִהְיֶה אֶל־יִשְׂרָאֵל אָבִיו שְׁלָחָה
הַנַּעַר אֶתִּי וְנִקְוָמָה וְנִלְכָּה וְנַחֲיָה וְלֹא
נָמוּת גַּם־אֲנַחְנוּ גַם־אַתָּה גַם־טַפֵּנוּ:
9 אֲנֹכִי אֶעֱרָבְנִי מִיָּדֶי תִּבְקָשְׁנוּ אִם־לֹא
הִבִּיאֲתִיו אֵלַיךָ וְהִצַּגְתִּיו לְפָנֶיךָ וְחָטְאתִי
לִךָ כָּל־הַיָּמִים: ¹⁰ כִּי לֹא־הָיָה הַתְּמַהֲמָה־נָּה
כִּי־עָתָה שָׁכְנוּ זֶה פַעַמִּים:

11 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיהֶם אִם־כֵּן |
אֲפֹאֵא נָאת עֲשׂוּ קָחוּ מִזִּמְרַת הָאָרֶץ
בְּכֵלֵיכֶם וְהוֹרִידוּ לְאִישׁ מִנְחָה מֵעֵט צִרִי

seph had indeed asked the specific questions referred to here. It must, therefore, be assumed that chapter 42 represents a very abbreviated account.

our family The word *moledet* is used here in the sense of "kindred."

8. Then Judah said The argument has reached a dead end. Judah steps in to save the situation.

you and we and our children In Hebrew, the order is "we and you and our children." Judah lists them in ascending order of importance to himself.

the boy The word *na-ar* can be used of any male from infancy (Exod. 2:6) to marriageable age (Gen. 34:19). The probability of Benjamin's youthfulness accords with, and renders especially poignant, Jacob's fears and reluctance to let him undertake the journey to Egypt.

9. I myself Meaning, "I personally."

be surety The Hebrew stem ערר most frequently refers to the acceptance of legal responsibility for a debt contracted by another. The guarantor undertakes to ensure that the bor-

rower will not disappear or to repay the loan should the borrower default.

hold me responsible The Hebrew phrase *l'vakkesh mi-yad*, "to hold responsible," "to require an accounting for," is particularly used with respect to bloodshed.

forever Personal guilt and blame would weigh on him always.

11. If it must be so Judah's forceful speech has its effect. The aged Jacob offers no further resistance and resigns himself to the inevitable.

do this The Egyptian vizier must be placated with a gift, and the payments for the grain are to be returned.

choice products of the land The noun *zimrah* in this verse, derived from a similar word in Ugaritic, corresponds to *ko-ah* (strength), which also is used in the sense of "yield, produce" (Gen. 4:12; Hos. 7:9; Job 31:39).

gift The word *minbah* signifies a gift brought as a token of submission.

honey Biblical *d'vash* refers to the thick, intensely sweet syrup made from dates and grapes or figs and is called *dibs* by the Arabs.

CHAPTER 43

8. Reuben had spoken rashly and foolishly to Jacob (42:37—Why would Jacob want to kill

his own grandchildren?). Judah, who had himself experienced the loss of two children (Gen. 38:6–10), is now able to speak convincingly to Jacob's heart.

and some honey, gum, ladanum, pistachio nuts, and almonds. ¹²And take with you double the money, carrying back with you the money that was replaced in the mouths of your bags; perhaps it was a mistake. ¹³Take your brother too; and go back at once to the man. ¹⁴And may El Shaddai dispose the man to mercy toward you, that he may release to you your other brother, as well as Benjamin. As for me, if I am to be bereaved, I shall be bereaved."

¹⁵So the men took that gift, and they took with them double the money, as well as Benjamin. They made their way down to Egypt, where they presented themselves to Joseph. ¹⁶When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to his house steward, "Take the men into the house; slaughter and prepare an animal, for the men will dine with me at noon." ¹⁷The man did as Joseph said, and he brought the men into Joseph's house. ¹⁸But the men were frightened at being brought into Joseph's house. "It must be," they thought, "because of the money replaced in our bags the first time that we have been brought inside, as a pretext to attack us and seize us as slaves, with our pack animals." ¹⁹So they went up to Joseph's house steward and spoke to him at the entrance of the house. ²⁰"If you please, my lord," they said, "we came down once before to procure food. ²¹But when

ומעט דבש נכאת ולט בטנים ושקדים: ¹² וכסף משנה קחו בידכם ואת הכסף המושב בפי אמתחתיכם תשיבו בידכם אולי משנה הוא: ¹³ ואת אחיכם קחו וקומו שובו אל האיש: ¹⁴ ואל שדי יתן לכם רחמים לפני האיש ושלח לכם את אחיכם אחר ואת בנימין ואני פאשר שכלתי שכלתי:

¹⁵ ויקחו האנשים את המנחה הזאת ומשנה כסף לקחו בידם ואת בנימין ויקמו וירדו מצרים ויעמדו לפני יוסף: ¹⁶ וירא יוסף אתם את בנימין ויאמר לאשר על ביתו הבא את האנשים הביתה וטבח טבח והכן כי אתי יאכלו האנשים בצהרים: ¹⁷ ויעש האיש פאשר אמר יוסף ויבא האיש את האנשים ביתה יוסף: ¹⁸ ויראו האנשים כי הובאו בית יוסף ויאמרו על דבר הכסף השב באמתחתינו בתחלה אנחנו מובאים להתגלל עלינו ולהתנפל עלינו ולקחת אתנו לעבדים ואתחמרינו: ¹⁹ ויגשו אל האיש אשר על בית יוסף וידברו אליו פתח הבית: ²⁰ ויאמרו כי אדני ירד ירדנו בתחלה לשפר אכל:

12. double the money The second clause of this verse clarifies the reason for the double amount. One part is for the purchase of food; the other is to return the sum of money placed in their bags.

a mistake Jacob appears to be trying to convince himself that the return of the money by the Egyptians has no sinister motives.

13. Take your brother The aged patriarch leaves the most painful matter till the end. His use of the words "your brother," rather than Benjamin, appears to emphasize their fraternal responsibilities.

14. As for me Having done all that is humanly possible, Jacob now leaves the rest to God, whose blessing he invokes.

if I am to be bereaved Jacob's words opened (v. 11) and now close on a note of sorrowful resignation.

THE BROTHERS IN JOSEPH'S HOUSE (vv. 15-34)

16. his house steward Literally, "the one who is over his house."

18. frightened Because they alone, of all the buyers of grain, are singled out for this treatment. The brothers are probably aware that high Egyptian officials maintained private dungeons in their homes.

19. at the entrance They lose no time in deterring an accusation.

we arrived at the night encampment and opened our bags, there was each one's money in the mouth of his bag, our money in full. So we have brought it back with us.²² And we have brought down with us other money to procure food. We do not know who put the money in our bags."²³ He replied, "All is well with you; do not be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, must have put treasure in your bags for you. I got your payment." And he brought out Simeon to them.

²⁴Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house; he gave them water to bathe their feet, and he provided feed for their asses.²⁵ They laid out their gifts to await Joseph's arrival at noon, for they had heard that they were to dine there.

²⁶When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts that they had brought with them into the house, bowing low before him to the ground.²⁷ He greeted them, and he said, "How is your aged father of whom you spoke? Is he still in good health?"²⁸ They replied, "It is well with your servant our father; he is still in

21 וַיְהִי כִּי־בָאוּ אֶל־הַמְּלֹאן וַנִּפְתְּחָה אֶת־אֲמֹתֹתֵינוּ וְהִנֵּה כֶּסֶף־אִישׁ בְּפִי אֲמֹתֹתָיו כֶּסֶפְנוּ בְּמִשְׁקָלוֹ וַנִּשֶׁב אֹתוֹ בִּידְנוֹ: 22 וְכֶסֶף אַחַר הוֹרְדָנוּ בִּידְנוּ לְשִׁבְר־אֶכֶל לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מִי־שָׂם בְּכֶסֶפְנוּ בְּאֲמֹתֹתֵינוּ: 23 וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלוֹם לָכֶם אֵל־תִּירָאוּ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹיכֶם נָתַן לָכֶם מִטְמוֹן בְּאֲמֹתֹתֵיכֶם כֶּסֶפְכֶם בָּא אֵלַי וַיֹּצֵא אֲלֵהֶם אֶת־שִׁמְעוֹן:

24 וַיָּבֵא הָאִישׁ אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים בֵּיתָה יוֹסֵף וַיִּתֶּן־מַיִם וַיְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיהֶם וַיִּתֶּן מִסְפּוֹא לְחֲמֵרֵיהֶם: 25 וַיִּכְיְנוּ אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה עַד־בּוֹא יוֹסֵף בַּצְּהָרִים כִּי שָׁמְעוּ כִּי־שָׂם יֹאכְלוּ לֶחֶם:

26 וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף הַבֵּיתָה וַיְבִיאוּ לוֹ אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה אֲשֶׁר־בְּיָדָם הַבֵּיתָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ־לוֹ אַרְצָה: 27 וַיִּשְׂאֵל לָהֶם לְשָׁלוֹם וַיֹּאמֶר הַשְׁלוֹם אֲבֹיכֶם הֲזָקָן אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתֶּם הַעוֹדְנוּ חַיִּי: 28 וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׁלוֹם לְעַבְדְּךָ

v. 26. א' דגוש

21. *in full* Literally, "by its weight."

23. *All is well* This reassurance on the part of the steward is intelligible only if it is assumed that he is privy to Joseph's scheme. His purpose is to lull them into a false sense of security, bolstered by the release of Simeon.

I got your payment Literally, "your money came to me," a legal formula used by ancient Near Eastern traders to confirm receipt of full payment and implying renunciation of any claim.

27. *your aged father* The adjective was not reported in the account of the brothers' first meeting with Joseph, but 44:20 shows that it had indeed been used.

28. *bowed and made obeisance* Either as a sign of appreciation to Joseph for his solicitude in asking about their father's welfare or as a gesture of gratitude to God, a physical equivalent of the verbal "Thank God."

23. *Your God, the God of your father, must have put treasure* Joseph has taught the steward and his other servants to see the hand of God in life's unexpected blessings.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

43:27 *How is your aged father* Asking about a person's well-being became an expected norm in rabbinic Judaism, both as an act of friendship and as a way of knowing when to fulfill the commandment of visiting the sick (*bikkur holim*) (BT Ned. 39b-40a). We also recite the *Mi she-Berakh* prayer for the sick in the synagogue, in part to beseech God's aid in healing and in part to notify the congregation of who is ill and in need of the support of the community.

good health.” And they bowed and made obeisance.

²⁹Looking about, he saw his brother Benjamin, his mother’s son, and asked, “Is this your youngest brother of whom you spoke to me?” And he went on, “May God be gracious to you, my boy.” ³⁰With that, Joseph hurried out, for he was overcome with feeling toward his brother and was on the verge of tears; he went into a room and wept there. ³¹Then he washed his face, reappeared, and—now in control of himself—gave the order, “Serve the meal.” ³²They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; for the Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians. ³³As they were seated by his direction, from the oldest in the order of his seniority to the youngest in the order of his youth, the men looked at one another in astonishment. ³⁴Portions were served them from his table; but Benjamin’s portion was several times that of anyone else. And they drank their fill with him.

30. overcome with feeling The sight of Benjamin arouses overwhelming tenderness and affection in Joseph. He can find relief only through tears.

31. Serve the meal Joseph hosts a meal for his brothers, who years before had callously sat down to eat while he languished in a pit.

32. They served him by himself Joseph eats alone because of his august status. The Hebrews were segregated because the Egyptians, believing themselves racially and religiously superior to all other peoples, were generally contemptuous of foreigners.

could not dine That is, were prohibited from dining.

לְאֲבִינוּ עֹדְדָנוּ חַי וַיִּקְדְּוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ:
²⁹וַיִּשָׂא עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא אֶת־בְּנֵי־מִינְיָן אֲחִיו בְּדֶ-
 אִמּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר הֲזֶה אֲחִיכֶם הַקָּטָן אֲשֶׁר
 אָמַרְתֶּם אֵלַי וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יַחֲנֶנּוּ בְנֵי:
³⁰וַיַּמְהַר יוֹסֵף פִּי־נִבְכְּמוֹ רַחֲמָיו אֶל־
 אֲחִיו וַיִּבְקֶשׁ לְבָכוֹת וַיָּבֵא הַחֲדָרָה וַיִּבְכֶּה
 שָׁמָּה: ³¹וַיִּרְחֹץ פָּנָיו וַיֵּצֵא וַיִּתְאַפֵּק
 וַיֹּאמֶר שִׁימוּ לָחֶם: ³²וַיִּשְׁימוּ לוֹ לְבֶדֶן
 וְלֵהֶם לְבֶדֶם וְלַמִּצְרָיִם הָאֲכָלִים אֹתוֹ
 לְבֶדֶם כִּי לֹא יוּכְלָן הַמִּצְרָיִם לֶאֱכֹל
 אֶת־הָעֵבְרִים לָחֶם בִּיְתוּעָבָה הוּא
 לַמִּצְרָיִם: ³³וַיִּשְׁבוּ לִפְנֵי הַבָּכָר בְּבִכְרָתוֹ
 וְהֵצֵעִיר כְּצַעֲרָתוֹ
 וַיִּתְמַהּוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ:
³⁴וַיִּשָׂא מִשָּׂאת מֵאֵת פָּנָיו אֲלֵהֶם וְהִרְבַּ
 מִשָּׂאת בְּנֵי־מִינְיָן מִמִּשָּׂאת כָּלֶם חֲמֵשׁ יָדוֹת
 וַיִּשְׁתּוּ וַיִּשְׂכְּרוּ עִמּוֹ:

33. were seated by his direction Literally, “they sat before him.” Saadia and Rashbam point out that the seating arrangement by descending order of seniority could only be at Joseph’s direction. This surprises the brothers. The Egyptians, too, are astonished that the vizier should invite foreigners—especially shepherds, an abhorrent profession (46:34)—to dine at his house.

34. several Literally, “five.” Joseph is perhaps testing his brothers to see whether this obvious favoritism would arouse their envy or expose any hostile feelings that they might harbor against the one who is now their father’s favorite and Joseph’s as well.

THE BROTHERS’ LAST TRIAL (44:1–34)

After their reception at Joseph’s house, the brothers set out on their homeward journey, undoubtedly in high spirits. Their light mood is shat-

tered, however, as Joseph employs his final stratagem.

44 Then he instructed his house steward as follows, "Fill the men's bags with food, as much as they can carry, and put each one's money in the mouth of his bag. ²Put my silver goblet in the mouth of the bag of the youngest one, together with his money for the rations." And he did as Joseph told him.

³With the first light of morning, the men were sent off with their pack animals. ⁴They had just left the city and had not gone far, when Joseph said to his steward, "Up, go after the men! And when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why did you repay good with evil?' ⁵It is the very one from which my master drinks and which he uses for divination. It was a wicked thing for you to do!"

⁶He overtook them and spoke those words to them. ⁷And they said to him, "Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything of the kind! ⁸Here we brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money that we found in the mouths of our bags. How then could we have stolen any silver or gold from your master's house! ⁹Whichever

מד ויצו את אשר על ביתו לאמר מלא את אמתחת האנשים אכל כאשר יוכלון שאת ושים כסף איש בפי אמתחתו: ²ואת גביעי הכסף תשים בפי אמתחת הקטן ואת כסף שברו ויעש כדבר יוסף אשר דבר: ³הבקר אור והאנשים שלחו המה וחמריהם: ⁴הם יצאו את העיר לא הרחיקו ויוסף אמר לאשר על ביתו קום רדף אחרי האנשים והשגתם ואמרת אליהם למה שלמתם רעה תחת טובה: ⁵הלוא זה אשר ישפה אדני בו והוא נחש ינחש בו הרעתם אשר עשיתם: ⁶וישגם וידבר אליהם את הדברים האלה: ⁷ויאמרו אליו למה ידבר אדני כדברים האלה חלילה לעבדיך מעשות כדבר הזה: ⁸הן כסף אשר מצאנו בפי אמתחתינו השיבנו אליך מארץ כנען ואיך נגנב מבית אדניך כסף או זהב: ⁹אשר ימצא אתו מעבדיך ומת וגם-

JOSEPH'S INSTRUCTIONS (vv. 1-5)

1. Then he instructed These preparations no doubt take place during the night while the brothers sleep.

Fill the men's bags By supplying them in excess of what their money can buy, Joseph makes them appear all the more ungrateful when they are apprehended for alleged theft.

put each one's money The restoration of their money this time is puzzling, because it plays no role in the accusation that is soon to be made against them.

2. goblet A "libation vessel" for wine, larger than an ordinary cup and used also as a receptacle for oil in the menorah of the Tabernacle. Here, the goblet serves both as a drinking vessel and as a divining instrument (v. 5).

3. the first light of morning This explains why Joseph is still at home when the brothers later return (v. 14).

4. the city The city is said to be situated "in the region of Goshen." See Comment to 45:10.

repay good with evil In verse 50:20, Joseph tells his brothers that God used their evil intentions to good end.

5. It is the very one The one they saw him using at dinner. They cannot claim it is their own property.

he uses for divination It is not stated that Joseph actually believes in divination, but he wants the brothers to think he does.

THE STEWARD'S ACCUSATION AND SEARCH (vv. 6-12)

8. How then could we have stolen This inference from a minor premise ("Here") to a major one ("How then") is known in rabbinic terminology as *kal va-homer*. There are 10 instances of this type of reasoning in the Bible, listed in Gen. R. 92:7.

of your servants it is found with shall die; the rest of us, moreover, shall become slaves to my lord." ¹⁰He replied, "Although what you are proposing is right, only the one with whom it is found shall be my slave; but the rest of you shall go free."

¹¹So each one hastened to lower his bag to the ground, and each one opened his bag. ¹²He searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest; and the goblet turned up in Benjamin's bag. ¹³At this they rent their clothes. Each reloaded his pack animal, and they returned to the city.

¹⁴When Judah and his brothers reentered the house of Joseph, who was still there, they threw themselves on the ground before him. ¹⁵Joseph said to them, "What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me practices divination?" ¹⁶Judah replied,

אֲנַחְנוּ נָהִיָּה לְאֲדֹנָי לְעֲבָדִים: ¹⁰וַיֹּאמֶר
גַּם-עַתָּה כְּדִבְרֵיכֶם כִּן-הוּא אֲשֶׁר יִמָּצֵא
אֹתוֹ יִהְיֶה-לִּי עֶבֶד וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ נְקִיִּים:
¹¹וַיִּמְהָרוּ וַיֹּרְדוּ אִישׁ אֶת-אֲמֹתָהוּ
אֶרְצָה וַיִּפְתְּחוּ אִישׁ אֲמֹתָהוּ:
¹²וַיִּחְפֹּשׂ בַּגְּדוֹל הַחֵל וּבִקְטָן כָּלָה וַיִּמָּצֵא
הַגְּבִיעַ בְּאֲמֹתַחַת בְּנִימָן: ¹³וַיִּקְרְעוּ
שִׁמְלֹתָם וַיַּעֲמִסּוּ אִישׁ עַל-חֻמְרוֹ וַיָּשׁבוּ
הָעִירָה:

¹⁴וַיָּבֹא יְהוּדָה וְאָחִיו בֵּיתָה יוֹסֵף וְהוּא
מַפְטִיר עוֹדְנֵי שָׁם וַיִּפְּלוּ לִפְנֵי אֶרְצָה: ¹⁵וַיֹּאמֶר
לָהֶם יוֹסֵף מָה-הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר
עֲשִׂיתֶם הֲלוֹא יָדַעְתֶּם כִּי-יִנְחַשׁ יִנְחַשׁ
אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כְּמֹנִי: ¹⁶וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה מִה-

9. shall die The proposed punishments reflect no known Egyptian law. It is possible that because the brothers are convinced of their innocence, they propose a penalty for themselves that is harsher than the law actually requires.

the rest of us The brothers accept the principle of collective responsibility.

10. what you are proposing The opening words of the steward's response—literally, "also now according to your words so it is"—could mean, "The penalties you invoke are indeed the law, but I shall be lenient," or, "I accept the logic of your argument to the effect that you are generally honest."

shall go free The word *n'kiyim* is a legal term for "cleared of offense or obligation."

11. hastened Their haste is a demonstration of innocence as well as an attempt to dispose of the entire business as quickly as possible.

12. He searched The steward adroitly manipulates the situation. One can imagine the ris-

ing self-confidence of the brothers after each successive search yielded nothing.

THE RETURN TO JOSEPH (vv. 13–17)

13. they rent their clothes The horror of their predicament leaves them speechless. They can only do what they caused their father to do years before (37:34).

14. Judah He takes the lead, because he took on the safety of Benjamin as his personal obligation.

who was still there Joseph has not yet left the house for his place of work because it is still very early in the morning (v. 3). His presence, therefore, does not raise any suspicion of trickery.

on the ground This addition to the usual phrase expresses their state of utter despair.

15. Joseph said Feigning anger, he addresses them collectively, implying that they are all involved in the theft. His "leniency," soon to

CHAPTER 44

12. Benjamin's mother, Rachel, had stolen Laban's idols and hidden them in her baggage. Will Benjamin be accused of acting similarly

(Gen. R. 92:8)? Joseph's trap is now set. How will the brothers respond? Will they abandon Benjamin out of resentment of Jacob's favoring him? Or have they learned how to be brothers?

“What can we say to my lord? How can we plead, how can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered the crime of your servants. Here we are, then, slaves of my lord, the rest of us as much as he in whose possession the goblet was found.”¹⁷ But he replied, “Far be it from me to act thus! Only he in whose possession the goblet was found shall be my slave; the rest of you go back in peace to your father.”

נֹאמֵר לְאֲדֹנָי מִה־נִּדְבַר וּמִה־נִּצְטַדֵּק
הָאֱלֹהִים מִצָּא אֶת־עֵוֹן עַבְדֶּיךָ הַנֶּנְנוּ
עַבְדִּים לְאֲדֹנָי גַּם־אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם אֲשֶׁר־נִמְצָא
הַגְּבִיעַ בְּיָדוֹ: ¹⁷וַיֹּאמֶר הָלִילָה לִּי
מִעֲשׂוֹת זֹאת הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר נִמְצָא הַגְּבִיעַ
בְּיָדוֹ הוּא יִהְיֶה־לִּי עֶבֶד וְאַתֶּם עָלוּ
לְשָׁלוֹם אֶל־אֲבִיכֶם: פ

be displayed (v. 17), thus appears to be all the more generous.

practices divination See Comment to verse 5. Because no mention is made of the goblet, it may be assumed that Joseph simply boasts of his ability to detect a thief by divination.

16. the crime of your servants Judah is perhaps falsely confessing collective guilt regarding the theft of the goblet to save Benjamin from being singled out for punishment. Alternatively, he is expressing the ancient belief that suffering is divine punishment for sin, even if the sin could not be identified, and his words are a res-

ignation to misfortune. It also could be a veiled reference to their sale of Joseph.

slaves Judah wisely makes no reference to his earlier rash statement regarding the death penalty (v. 9).

17. Far be it from me Joseph now confronts the brothers with a dilemma. They can save their own lives, but that would be an act of disloyalty to Benjamin and a disaster to their father. Or they can remain with Benjamin, but they would then be unable to bring food to their father and their families, who would die of starvation.