

Autonomy and authenticity: Joseph's personal journey towards freedom and truth

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Autonomy and Authenticity: Joseph's Personal Journey Towards
Freedom and Truth.

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Introduction

1. Problem

"I am tired of being what you want me to be", the opening line of the song by Linkin Park entitled "Numb," addresses one of the universal problems in human relationships. The burden of expectations, desperate desire to be accepted and loved, social and educational pressure, the cult of idols, these all contribute to the inner slavery of human mind and heart. We are afraid of our true self and perform in order to fit expectations and norms. We are afraid to say "no" and live our own life and thus let other people decide for us. All this slavery of fear and dependence tramples God's idea for each of us as a unique and wonderful creation. It is a struggle between maintaining relationships with others but also remaining an autonomous individual at the same time. Whatever the context, the struggle itself is a healthy reaction of one's ego, expressing a need to be recognized and accepted within the society as an autonomous individual with one's own desires and rights, one's unique way of thinking and feeling, and one's own mind and proper way of life. A struggle to set clear boundaries between "me" and "you," to maintain a distance and an even relationship of person to person, rather than person to object. What should we do as people in order to emerge from that struggle victorious? How can we break the bonds of expectations and dependencies in order to become autonomous and authentic? Can we finally stop being tired of being what others want us to be, and become truly who we are?

2. Choices and assumptions

I have decided to look for an answer in biblical texts, which are both revelatory and instructive in the life of the faithful. The problem of autonomy and authenticity is one of the main issues in human life and can be traced in literary works all over the world and long back in time.

It seemed to me that the most adequate narratives can be found within the Persian period of Hebrew literature. It is a time when Jewish Diaspora dealt precisely with the issues of identity and freedom on many levels, while coexisting with other national groups in a foreign land. Those stories are filled with questions such as: Who are we? Who are we supposed to be? Do we have a right to remain different? What are the limits to inculturation? Such themes are very vividly presented in the Book of Esther, the Book of Ruth, The Book of Daniel and Joseph's narrative in the Book of Genesis, all of them composed in the Persian period. The ones which suit the question of this paper most are the stories of Esther and Joseph. Only these two depict a dynamic reality of maturation of the main character, as they grow towards autonomy and authenticity, freeing themselves from various constraints. Having worked on both of them, considering the limits of this paper, I have decided to focus on the Joseph's story only.

Being a Jesuit I am used to read the biblical stories in an anthropological and spiritual way, i.e., trying to access the minds of the characters, understanding their psychology and learning from their experience. Such practical and pedagogical approach comes from Ignatian Spirituality, which is largely build around biblical meditation and contemplation. A biblical narrative becomes for a reader like a mirror, enabling him or her to see their own emotions and motivations. Moreover, through vivid imagination they can live the events together with biblical characters and share in their experiences. This is how a narrative has a real pedagogical and transformative impact on the reader. Whereas my main focus in this paper will be literary analysis of the Joseph's story, it is unavoidable that it has been influenced by my Ignatian background. I have approached the text with certain assumptions, such as that Joseph's personal problems are an intended aspect of the story, that they will be resolved at the end of it, and that the story was designed to help the reader facing the same problem in their life. The analysis I

have performed, obviously, confirmed my assumptions and provided fruitful conclusions addressing the question of the paper. In order to avoid subjectivity, as much as it is possible, I was trying to compare my observations and conclusions with scholars from different backgrounds, using different methodologies. In the majority of cases their observations are in accord with mine.

I am aware that my work can be accused of psychologizing too much, i.e., imposing modern psychological knowledge upon the text and using psychological theories to explain the meaning of an ancient biblical narrative. This is a hermeneutical mistake which I was carefully trying to avoid from the very beginning. There are a few moments in this paper where I am quoting psychologists or psychotherapists, but never as an argument for a certain interpretation. Whenever I am referring to them it is only to show that the phenomenon observed in the narrative is also known to modern psychology. Despite differences in language and method, both biblical literature and psychology deal with the same object, i.e., the human nature with all its complexity.

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

To investigate the question of this paper I have chosen a fairly young methodology known as the narrative analysis. Its beginning is often associated with Robert Alter and his book "The Art of Biblical Narrative", published first in 1981.¹ The main focus of my paper are the characters present in the story. More precisely their inner life, motivations, thoughts, feelings and psychological transformations. These things are almost never explicitly mentioned by the biblical

¹ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.

authors and therefore are easily omitted in reading and interpreting. But it does not mean, that they are not present in the narrative. As many scholars point out, the narrative artistry of ancient Hebrew literature adapts a very particular way of describing the characters, which allows for an even more profound and complex psychology than any explicit description. Moreover, as some point out, these stories were designed to interact with the reader in such a way, that he or she may find themselves taking part in the story. As Auerbach puts it, "we are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history".² Thus the story becomes like a mirror for the one who reads it and tells the story of the reader himself or herself. The access to the characters' complex inner life and interaction with the reader are precisely the reasons for which I have chosen narrative analysis as the most adequate methodology for answering the question of my paper. I will now briefly present the methodology and its particular application in the creation of the characters.

3.2. Narrative Analysis

The literary style of the Hebrew Bible to a western mind appears to be odd, if not primitive or even completely artless. The choice of simple syntax, limited vocabulary, lack of descriptions and countless repetitions³ contribute to the image of the biblical author as an illiterate. A biblical story gives a reader very little information, only that which is substantial for the development of the story. There are no descriptions of places, things or even characters. It is more like a narrative outline or a sketch, yet still it constitutes a story. There are only bits of information and significant gaps between them. On the one hand this minimalism, or economy of writing, gives everything that is necessary for the proper understanding of the story. The narrator

² Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 15.

³ Linafelt, "Prolegomena to Meaning, Or, What Is 'Literary' about the Torah?," 65.

chooses carefully precise words and precise ways of presenting the story in a certain way and not in any other way.⁴ On the other hand it leaves a reader with wide gaps, ellipsis, which demand interpretation. These gaps, as Linafelt argues, are "not the absence of characterization but a certain mode of characterization, and in fact a fairly complex mode at that".⁵ In other words, the gaps are intentionally designed and contribute to the story in a similar way as the sparse bits of information. Using Auerbach's terminology, a biblical narrative is "fraught with background"⁶, i.e., if one looks beyond the minimalist foreground of the story, one can discover that there is a lot happening in its background.

The depth of this literary style is visible especially in portraying characters. In fact, such a minimalist style allows for a profound expression of complex psychological background of characters. Several plausible versions of interpreting a certain gap may express several motivations or feelings competing against each other within the inner life of the character. As Auerbach himself summarizes it, "Jewish writers are able to express the simultaneous existence of various layers of consciousness and the conflict between them".⁷ There are two initial conclusions drawn from this particular literary style. Firstly a reader should be very attentive to every single bit of information provided by the story, as each of them is crucial for the adequate reading and interpretation. Secondly a reader should be open to many possible interpretations of a single gap and allow for a dialogue between those interpretations. Only then one can discover the true depth and complexity of what is happening in the characters' mind.

⁴ Sonnet, "L'analisi narrativa dei racconti biblici," 52.

⁵ Linafelt, *The Hebrew Bible as Literature*, 18.

⁶ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 12.

⁷ Auerbach, 13.

3.3. Narrative analysis and creation of characters

Characters are crucial for the biblical narrative, which is occupied mainly with the "moral, religious and psychological phenomena".⁸ As it was mentioned above, biblical authors have mastered the art of presenting realistic, complex and sophisticated characters. The mode of presentation is rarely explicit, as the authors use a number of indirect devices in creating characters. In this short section I will present a few of those devices in order to give foundations for the analysis performed in this paper.

The biblical characters are presented by a variety of indirect details, such as the choice of name, relationships with others, actions or sparse brief descriptions revealing a particularly important detail.⁹ Most of their personality, however, is revealed through their words, i.e., speeches, dialogues, inner monologues or even silence. The way of speaking, the choice of words, the length of speech, all of these reveal who the speaker is.¹⁰ Let us have a look at several devices which I will be using throughout the whole paper. First of all, as Adele Berlin demonstrates, there are three categories of characters, each of them serving a particular role within the biblical narrative.¹¹ The first category contains "full-fledged" characters, i.e., those who are complex and profound, have emotions and motives, who change throughout the narrative and seem realistic. A reader is invited to take part in their life and go through the same experience. The second and third category, i.e., the "flat characters" and the "functionary characters", do not change during the narrative and we do not have much access to their inner life. As Berlin claims, their role is either to be a mirror for main characters or serve a particular narrow function in the story. They move the story forward or provoke main characters to show some of their personality

⁸ Auerbach, 14.

⁹ Sonnet, "L'analisi narrativa dei racconti biblici," 65.

¹⁰ Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 37–38.

¹¹ Berlin, 23–33.

or inner life.¹² Thus Joseph, Judah or Jacob are full-fledged characters, whereas Potiphar's wife, prisoners or Pharaoh are flat or functionary characters, serving a particular role in the narrative.

Secondly, characters tend to be defined by their name or their first words. Both of these are not only used as part of the narrative, but often serve a significant revelatory role.¹³ Although there aren't many instances of names in the Joseph's story, there are many moments when characters call other characters in a certain way. There is a reason and message behind such details as, e.g., Joseph referring to his brothers as "the sons of his father" (37:2) rather than "his brothers". Or when Potiphar's wife talking to her husband referring to Joseph as "the Hebrew, the slave, the one you brought". This choice of words in calling others is not random and shows something about the relationships between the characters. Similarly with revelatory lines, i.e., the first words spoken by the characters in the story.¹⁴ Potiphar's wife enters the stage with a direct and immediate order "Lie with me!" (39:7). And once again, this short line is not only a part of the plot, but it contributes to the "showing" of who Potiphar's wife is.

Thirdly, the authors of biblical narratives are concerned more with "showing" the characters, rather than "telling" who they are.¹⁵ One mode of "showing" is a careful description of actions, which are described in certain way and not in a different way. For example putting together three verbs with a similar meaning, instead of one, can underline immediacy and determination behind the action. The fact that Joseph is shaving his head (41:14) or washing his face (43:31), which is mentioned without any comment, is not irrelevant either. They both tell a lot about Joseph's inner life, motivations and psychology. Among the "showing" devices, as Sonnet underlines, dialogues are the most significant and most illustrative biblical way of

¹² Berlin, 86.

¹³ Beal, *Esther*, 2.

¹⁴ Beal, 16.

¹⁵ Sonnet, "L'analisi narrativa dei racconti biblici," 66.

presenting personalities of the characters.¹⁶ One masterful piece of such device is Potiphar's wife speech (39:14-19), which tells a lot about the situation in the house as well as their relationship with Joseph, Potiphar and other servants. Another example are various narrations of the selling of Joseph (37:23-36; 40:15;; 42:21-22; 44:18-34; 45:4-8; 50:19-21). Each of them, performed by various characters, shows how their perspective changes and how they see this one event in different ways, depending on the situation.

There are a few other devices worth mentioning here. Firstly, a direct description of the character is a very rare technique in biblical narratives. If it appears, however, then it is introduced for a very particular reason and bears an important message.¹⁷ Such detail, e.g., is Joseph's beauty (39:6), which is described in the very same way as his mothers beauty a few chapters earlier (29:17). Secondly, a lot can be seen by contrasting similar scenes and characters, which were designed for that purpose.¹⁸ This is the reason, for example, why I have divided the story into four similar and contrasting episodes. We will also see a contrast between Judah and Joseph in their respective climatic scenes of recognition. Finally, a point of view is another interesting device, useful in reading Joseph's story. Adele Berlin, following Chatman and Uspensky, distinguishes between three main points of view:¹⁹ psychological (perceptual, what and how a character sees), ideological (conceptual, how are events judged or assessed from moral, theological or historical view) and interest (the one whom particular observation concerns, i.e., the object of the point of view). The shifts of the point of view can be found within the sequence of events, in dialogues, contrasting scenes, usage of names and titles, descriptions etc., all of them already presented above.

¹⁶ Sonnet, 65.

¹⁷ Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 34–35.

¹⁸ Berlin, 40–41.

¹⁹ Berlin, 47–59.

3.4. Summary of the method

In this short introductory section I have presented briefly the methodology and logic of the narrative analysis. Whereas this method gives access to characters' inner life, we can never be sure if the outcome of such narrative analysis is certain. Meir Sternberg advocates a theoretical possibility of mastering narrative analysis. He claims that a modern reader, through imagination and training, can "become" a person from the past, an intended audience of biblical stories, for example by learning the Hebrew language.²⁰ It is, as Sternberg claims, like learning rules of a new game. One has to learn the whole context of the narratives, culture, language and style and thus be able to decipher the real intended message of the author.²¹ I am not as optimistic as Sternberg. Our knowledge of the biblical context is vastly limited, not to mention the differences of mentality and knowledge. The narrative analysis has its limits and should be constantly compared with other biblical disciplines, including archeology, historical, anthropological, political and social sciences. In this paper I will be bringing in the voices of other scholars and other disciplines in order to verify the outcome of my analysis.

4. Thesis

In this paper I am going to analyze Joseph's growth in *autonomy* and *authenticity*, as he frees himself from various *constraints* in order to reach personal freedom and truth. By *autonomy* I understand a freedom of action and decision in opposition of being dependent on others. It is "doing what I choose" rather than "doing what others want and expect me to do". By *authenticity* I understand the truth of one's self in opposition to masks and labels which obscure one's true identity. It is "being as I am" rather than "being someone else". Thus autonomy can be associated

²⁰ Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 11.

²¹ Sternberg, 10.

with personal freedom and authenticity with personal truth. By *constraints* I understand all those aspects of Joseph's life which prevent him from achieving autonomy and authenticity. These are relationships, desires and attitudes, which bind him or force him to act in a certain way.

The main question of this paper is practical, pedagogical and pastoral. How does the story of Joseph guide its readers towards their own autonomy and authenticity? This question can be split into two questions. Firstly, what are the constraints one has to face to grow in autonomy and authenticity? Secondly, how can one overcome those constraints and become an autonomous and authentic person? Answering the first question I will demonstrate four constraints which Joseph is struggling with: possessive relationships, self-centeredness, rivalry and false identity. Most of them run throughout the whole story. In answer to the second question, I will demonstrate four steps necessary for freeing oneself from constraints. The first of them, which initiates and concludes the process, is the intervention of a third party, which is strongly associated with God. The second step is a radical detachment from the present constraints. The third one is a long period of discernment in isolation, which ends up with a decision about one's future. The fourth and final step is embracing and accepting one's own past. Thus these four steps form a program of spiritual and personal growth, which I will develop and demonstrate in the conclusion of this paper.

5. Structure

The structure of this paper is built upon the structure of the narrative, which I have recognized as built around five households: the Jacob's household, the Judah's household, the Potiphar's household, the Pharaoh household and finally Joseph's own household. Each of these

episodes is a complete unit and should be read and interpreted as a whole.²² Additionally, they should be read in reference to each other. All of these episodes are type-scenes, i.e., scenes which share same context within which the main character acts and changes. Such repetition of the background allows for a better understanding of the character and his or her actions.²³ In other words, the same background of Joseph's actions brings out the contrast between Joseph's character in the first, second, third and fourth episodes.²⁴ All of these episodes present a similar setting, i.e., a household with an authority over it: Jacob, Potiphar, Pharaoh and Joseph. As this paper is focused only on Joseph and his journey towards autonomy and authenticity, I will be using those authorities as type-characters, i.e., characters which appear in different settings and serve same narrative role to act as a mirror for the main character, showing his or her development.²⁵ There are some other type-elements which link these episodes, such as clothing, pit/prison, food, events, actions and others, to whom I will be referring in my analysis. Within this framework I will be able to track Joseph's journey and assess his growth.

Thus the main body of the paper is divided into four chapters, each devoted to the analysis of the particular household-episode. I have included the household of Judah within the first chapter, as Judah himself is not the main object of my analysis. All of the chapters are built upon the same structure, focusing on the same themes of possessive relationships, self-centeredness, rivalry and identity. Each chapter ends with a concluding section in which all the observations are brought together in order to derive universal practical guidelines that a reader can implement in his or her life in order to grow in autonomy and authenticity. The final section of this paper is fully devoted to this practical dimension, bringing together all previous conclusions and drawing

²² Sonnet, "L'analisi narrativa dei racconti biblici," 55.

²³ Sonnet, 72–73.

²⁴ Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 40–41.

²⁵ Berlin, 22–23.

a program of spiritual and personal development, which can be derived from the narrative as a whole.

6. The Generations of Jacob

Before I begin my analysis I should place it within the broader context of the current debate over the "Joseph's cycle", as it is called by part of scholars. First of all, it is agreed that there were two versions of this story, ascribed to J and E sources.²⁶ The compilation of both stories results in a few contradiction in the plot, such as Joseph occupying at the same time positions of power and service, two different Potiphar's and the confusion between Ishmaelites and Midianites taking Joseph to Egypt. Whereas I acknowledge two different sources, I believe that the final redaction of the story keeps those contradiction for a narrative purpose, and I will be pointing out the role of these contradictions as the story moves on. Secondly, there is an ongoing debate whether this part of the Book of Genesis should be called the Joseph's cycle (beginning with Gen 37) or Jacob's cycle (starting even earlier with Gen 34).²⁷ In his article Richard Clifford made a convincing case for reading it as a "Jacob's cycle", taking into account the theme of rivalry, one of the major threads of the Book of Genesis, which narrows down to Judah and Joseph, as two central brother figures, who finally reach reconciliation.²⁸ I agree with Richard Clifford that the story of Joseph is a part of a bigger cycle and serves the purposes of a bigger theme within the Book of Genesis. Nevertheless, apart from being part of a bigger narrative whole, the story of Joseph is significantly elaborate, full of additional content and subplots, which have strong connections with other biblical texts, such as the Book of Esther or the Book of Daniel. The scope of my analysis is precisely one of the themes which is common for the story of

²⁶ Rad, *Genesis*, 348.

²⁷ Clifford, "Genesis 37-50: Joseph Story of Jacob Story?," 216.

²⁸ Clifford, 218.

Joseph and the story of Esther. Such choice of theme forces me to pick and choose particular fragments of the story, that are relevant for the subject matter. In other words, the object of my analysis is the figure of Joseph and the development of his character. Such choice of an object is a reason for beginning my analysis with chapter 37 and finishing the analysis on chapter 45.

Now, even though I focus on Joseph, he is not the only main character in the story. Moreover, he is not the only character who undergoes a process of maturation and growth towards autonomy and authenticity. The overall structure of the book of Genesis presents us with the "generations of Jacob" who is the father of the twelve tribes. Thus, on the one hand, Jacob is in the center of the story and, on the other, all the twelve sons share same important role, as all of them together constitute the people of Israel. The actual complete story of the twelve begins in chapter 30, with the conflict between Leah and Rachel, and ends in chapter 50, with the necessary transformation of the rest of the brothers.²⁹ Nevertheless, we can observe that two of the brothers have a distinguished place in the story. These are Judah and Joseph. Some claim that Judah is *the* main character in the story, whereas others show that Joseph's and Judah's stories should be read parallel.³⁰ The literary reason for this is the final first-born blessing of Jacob which is given to be shared by both Judah and Joseph.³¹ A historical reason is the long lasting division between the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel which seek reconciliation. Thus, e.g., chapter 38, even though short, is crucial for the understanding of Judah's transformation and vital in the proper interpretation of the climactic scene of Joseph's transformation. As I have mentioned above, all the brothers go through the process of transformation, which is usually concluded with the scene

²⁹ Clifford, 216.

³⁰ Clifford, 219.

³¹ Clifford, 215.

of recognition of the divine finger working in their lives.³² Judah recognizes his wickedness (Gen 38:26), Joseph recognizes his true self (Gen 45:2.5-8) and brothers recognize how their wickedness served as a tool in God's hands (Gen 50:18-21).³³ As Clifford puts it, "each brother or group of brothers had to come to that conclusion for themselves through a deep personal experience. First Judah, then Joseph, and lastly the other brothers had to arrive at this insight by seeing the collapse of their plans and a new plan suddenly unfolding."³⁴ Not only them, but also Jacob, as Clifford states as well, is still in a need of transformation. "He foolishly favoured one son to the near-destruction of the family. Depressed and self absorbed, he has been defied and manipulated by his sons since they reached adulthood. No less than his sons, Jacob needs rescue."³⁵ Thus, all in all, Joseph and Judah, together with their brothers, are all at the center of the story and all undergo a process of transformation. Nevertheless, I will follow closely Joseph only, with some additional attention to Judah in chapters 38 and 44.

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate Joseph's journey towards autonomy and authenticity. I will show what challenges appear on this journey and how Joseph overcomes them. In the course of my analysis I have identified four such challenges: clingy relationships, self-centeredness, rivalry and false identities or labels. Each of them prevents Joseph from being an autonomous and authentic individual. Among many lesser steps in his journey towards freedom and truth, Joseph makes four major steps, one in each of the four episodes. These four steps are: intervention of a third party, radical separation, discernment and, finally, acceptance. These four steps, as I will demonstrate, is what the story of Joseph teaches us about our own growth towards autonomy and authenticity.

³² Clifford, 215.

³³ Clifford, 215.

³⁴ Clifford, 225.

³⁵ Clifford, 226.

Chapter 1: Jacob's Household

1. Setting the stage

I will demonstrate that the first episode introduces three constraints on Joseph's journey towards autonomy and authenticity, namely possessive, clingy relationship from the father, aggressive rivalry with brothers and Joseph's own narcissistic tendencies³⁶. Such a threefold distinction, made for the purpose of this paper, is artificial, as all of the constraints are interconnected, causing and influencing one another. The three constraints will continue throughout the story as none of them is resolved in the first episode. The main message of this episode, as I will demonstrate, is that these constraints causing tension and conflict are so strong, that Joseph's progress towards autonomy and authenticity is impossible, as it will very likely end up with death. It requires a third neutral party to intervene, separate Joseph from the "enslaving"³⁷ context and enable him further journey.

2. Possessive Relationship

In this section I will demonstrate a highly clingy and possessive relationship that Jacob has towards Joseph. I will argue that it is not a simple favoritism, but deeply disordered relationship which turned Joseph into a dependent and passive boy and was the cause of Joseph's self-centeredness and rivalry. This highly dependent relationship prevents Joseph from becoming an autonomous person. He is treated as *someone else*, filling the void after the loss of Rachel and Rebecca in Jacob's life. This position of consoling Jacob's loss prevents him from discovering his

³⁶ It is common among scholars to refer to Joseph as a narcissist but there is a slight inconsistency in using this term. Narcissism is a modern psychological term and refers to a personal condition which defines a person for life. In the story of Joseph, as I will demonstrate, narcissistic tendencies end in the third episode, as there is no evidence for Joseph's narcissism further. A more appropriate term thus would be "self-centeredness" as it does not carry any specific psychological meaning.

³⁷ By "enslaving" I mean preventing from growing in autonomy and authenticity. Being unable to act on one's own and being unable to be truly who one is, is, in fact, a situation of slavery or imprisonment.

true identity and becoming authentic. I will show that Joseph is defenseless in this relationship, following Jacob's initiative passively as an "obedient pet".

2.1. Favoritism

Favoritism is one of the main themes in the Book of Genesis and it enters the stage in the very beginning of the Joseph's story. We read that Jacob loved (אהב) Joseph (Gen 37:3), despite the fact that the young kid was bringing bad report about his own brothers. Many authors point out in different ways that Jacob's relationship towards Joseph is not simply a relationship of preference or love. As Brodie puts it, "the atmosphere surrounding the Jacob-Joseph relationship (...) is not only loving. It is also confused, in some way disordered."³⁸

The official reason for this particular relationship between Jacob and Joseph, as stated by the narrator, is the fact that Joseph was a "child of his old age" (Gen 37:3), but there are also a few other hints that help us understand the nature of the relationship. We can learn a lot about it by looking back at Jacob's relationship with Rachel, the mother of Joseph. Joseph is the eleventh, second to last, son of Jacob, but at the same time he is the "firstborn", in a way that he is the first child born of Jacobs preferred (אהב) wife Rachel. It is Jacob's preference for Rachel that explains his further preference for Joseph. First of all, the text underlines a striking resemblance between Joseph and Rachel. Both characters are described with the use of four exact same words, which refer to their beauty.³⁹ Once more we have to remember, that a direct characterization is a rare thing in biblical narratives, and when it appears it is crucial for the story. Thus we read about both Rachel and Joseph, that they are beautiful and pleasant to look at:

³⁸ Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 358.

³⁹ As it will be shown in the next chapter, this very characterization of Joseph will become one of the reasons for another possessive relationship.

וְרַחֵל הָיְתָה יֹפֵת־תָּאֵר וַיִּפֶּת מִרְאָה:

וַיֵּאָהֵב יַעֲקֹב אֶת־רַחֵל

(Gen 29:17-18)

וַיְהִי יוֹסֵף וַיִּפְהֶ־תָּאֵר וַיִּפֶּה מִרְאָה:

(Gen 39:6)

Now, the relationship between Jacob and both Rachel and Joseph is also described by the same the Hebrew word אהב. אהב is a very specific word in the Hebrew dictionary and it has a peculiar place within the Book of Genesis. The word is usually translated as "to love", but its exact semantic meaning is more complex.⁴⁰ The main two meanings, referring to relationships between human beings, are sexual desire and a legal relation of choice or preference. David Vanderhooft argues that the first and basic meaning of אהב is precisely "to choose", to pick one thing and discard all other things.⁴¹ It is often connected with marriage (preferring and committing to one wife), children (preferring one child over another) or having some disordered attachment to a particular item (like Isaac's אהב for food which is connected to his אהב of Esau). I would like to argue that in the narratives of the Book of Genesis this verb is ambiguous and it has a slight "disordered" flavor. In the patriarchal narratives אהב always begins a *peripeteia*, i.e., it is introduced as a problem, destroys relationships and needs to be resolved at the end of those narratives. It is first used in the narrative of *aqedah* of Isaac. God calls Abraham to take "his son, the only one, the one he loves (אהב), Isaac" (Gen 22:2). After the test, though, God uses the exact same words except for אהב, telling Abraham that he had passed the test (Gen 22:12). It seems as if the test was partly aimed at this relationship which needed to change. Then in the case of Isaac his preference towards Esau is obviously disordered, as it is based on his preference for food (Gen 25:28). As Vanderhooft states, אהב of items or things in the bible is always a disordered

⁴⁰ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 12–13.

⁴¹ Vanderhooft, "ʿAhābāh: Philological Observations on ʿāhēb/ʿahābāh in the Hebrew Bible.," 55–56.

relationship.⁴² Rebecca's אהב for Jacob leads to tragedy and ends up in separation (25:28). Jacob's אהב for Rachel is tested by fourteen years of waiting in separation (29:20-27). Whatever the story, it seems that אהב is a force that pushes or clings a person towards another one and is always confronted or tested in various ways, by God, other characters or fate. From the pedagogical point of view these stories teach us we should be careful with אהב and not give in to it.

Now, as I have mentioned, Rebecca's אהב of Jacob ended up in long separation. Jacob has suffered a loss of his beloved mother, for whom he was *the* beloved son (25:28). After being separated from her, Jacob run away to her family country (29:1). When he arrives there (Gen 29:10), everything he sees there (including Rachel herself!) reminds him of his mother, which is mentioned three times in one verse. In this context he weeps, kisses Rachel and tells her, again, that he is Rebecca's son. In other words, Rachel's resemblance to Rebecca is precisely what triggers this whole emotional sequence in Jacob. Moreover, this attachment is so strong that it motivates Jacob to perform heroic actions, such as removing a heavy stone or working fourteen years in Leban's household (29:10).⁴³ Thus we can conclude, that Rachel, apart from being a beautiful young woman, evoked in Jacob memories of his lost mother and became a substitute for her. Now, Jacob loved (אהב) Rachel but had to wait long in order to marry her (29:20-27). Eventually he did not fully experience the joy of being with his Rachel, as she turned out to be barren and eventually died during her second childbirth (35:16-19). Such course of events shows that Jacob's relationship with Rachel, as previously with his mother, was unfulfilled and his desires towards her unsatisfied. After the loss of Rachel the only two persons who can still remind Jacob of his mother and wife are Joseph and Benjamin. It may be the case, therefore, that Joseph became for Jacob a compensation for that loss, someone who would fill in the hole in his

⁴² Vanderhooft, 54–56.

⁴³ Zakovitch, *Jacob*, 62.

heart. Instead of being a free person with his own identity, Joseph became for Jacob a projection of his sorrowful unfulfilled dreams.

Thus there is a strong possibility, that Joseph *is* for Jacob a substitute for his lost wife. It is not the first time that Jacob looks for compensation after a loss. Jacob is determined not only to compensate for his loss, but to protect himself from suffering it again. When he goes to meet Esau (Gen 32), fearing his anger and his military band approaching, he organizes all his household in a certain logic, putting Rachel and Joseph at the very end of the march (33:2). In other words, he gives them the safest place, puts all his efforts to protect them and make sure that no one will take them from him. Despite this effort and reconciliation with Esau, Rachel dies soon in childbirth. The same attitude can be seen later on in the story, when Jacob clings to Benjamin (42:33-43:6), the last son of Rachel, protects him, does not let him go and treats him as another replacement, this time also a substitute for Joseph.⁴⁴ This may be a reason for which, as Brodie points out, "Jacob's response to the loss of Joseph is not just sadness but also a *clinging* to sadness."⁴⁵

This relationship of Jacob towards Joseph is perfectly depicted by the symbolic function of the unique tunic. From the analysis of the mere structure of verse 3 we can see that the tunic is juxtaposed with the verb אהב and thus should be perceived as a token of Jacob's love towards Joseph (Gen 37:3):

וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִכָּל־בָּנָיו כִּי־בָן־זִקְנִים הוּא לּוֹ וַעֲשָׂה לּוֹ בְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים

⁴⁴ Kaminsky, "Reclaiming a Theology of Election: Favoritism and the Joseph Story," 141.

⁴⁵ Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 358.

The type of this garment is and has been obscure for biblical scholars even since the formation of the Septuagint. It is widely agreed that this particular tunic, which appears only twice in the whole Bible (Gen 37 and 2Sam 13:18a), is of a particular importance, as it is mentioned five times in this chapter of the Joseph's story. Von Rad points out that it designates a particular robe worn by royal daughters.⁴⁶ Robert Alter narrows it down and argues that these were robes worn by virgin princesses.⁴⁷ In his recent article Heath Dewrell introduces some comparative Assyrian evidence and confirms the previous hypotheses, that the tunic is a formal sign of a particular social and sexual status, i.e., a virgin princess.⁴⁸ While his analysis is thorough and impressive, I am not sure that all of Dewrell's conclusions are derived properly. He claims, for example, that the only narrative roles of the unique tunic is, firstly, to make sure that it is the same item throughout the story and, secondly, to establish connections with the Judah-Tamar (Gen 38) and Amnon-Tamar (2 Sam 13) stories. Moreover, he claims that in the process of redaction the "scribe likely had only a vague idea of what כתנת פסים actually meant".⁴⁹ I don't think it is justified to reduce the role of the tunic so radically. I think that the author of the story knew perfectly the exact meaning of this word and he put it intentionally in the story. As I have mentioned above, characterization is very rare in biblical narratives and when it appears it has a crucial meaning. The nature of this garment, as analyzed by Dewrell contributes a lot to the story and is in accordance with the analysis presented above. It is an ironic way of showing how Jacobs's relationship towards Joseph is overprotective, exaggerated, inappropriate and connected to female figures from his past.

⁴⁶ Rad, *Genesis*, 351.

⁴⁷ Alter, *Genesis*, 209.

⁴⁸ Dewrell, "How Tamar's Veil Became Joseph's Coat: The Meaning of תנתכ (ה) מיספ," 166.

⁴⁹ Dewrell, 172.

2.2. Joseph's Activity

Let us now turn to Joseph's response to the situation. The first striking observation is Joseph's stunning passivity throughout the whole episode. Jacob is the main agent while Joseph only shows his readiness and obedience⁵⁰ by the willful *הִקְנִי* (Gen 37:13), which resembles the earlier episode of the binding of Isaac (22:1.7.11), i.e., which also dealt with the problem of *אֵהָב*, as suggested above. Jacob's initiative and Joseph's absolute passivity are visible throughout the chapter. This meaningful silence is not simply a lack of description of Joseph's words. As Sonnet remarks, such lack of speech is intentional, to show a character being silent vis-a-vis the events he or she faces.⁵¹ Yair Zakovitch makes an interesting point which may help us understand this particular case. He analyses Rebecca's love for Jacob and points out the very same passivity about Jacob facing Rebecca: "She is the active figure, he the passive one: "Rebekah took the clothes of Esau her older son (...) and she dressed Jacob her younger son (...)." ⁵² He concludes that "the image of a forty-year-old man standing, arms outstretched, waiting for his mother to dress him invites ridicule and wonder. Submissive obedience may be a tolerated excuse for a young boy who carries out his mother's morally questionable directions, but certainly not for a grown man."⁵³ Clifford points out that it is because of this passivity that Jacob failed as a leader of the family and a father of his sons a few times.⁵⁴ Thus this passivity of Jacob, which begun within the relationship with his mother, shaped him for the whole life. This image may be juxtaposed with Lowenthal's observations, that Jacob's twisted relationship towards Joseph has its origins and was influenced by his previous relationships with Rebecca and Rachel. Having suffered a loss of relationship with his mother himself, Jacob "wanted to compensate him

⁵⁰ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 243–44.

⁵¹ Sonnet, "L'analisi narrativa dei racconti biblici," 65–66.

⁵² Zakovitch, *Jacob*, 30–31.

⁵³ Zakovitch, 31.

⁵⁴ Clifford, "Genesis 37-50: Joseph Story of Jacob Story?," 218.

(Joseph) for her (Rachel's) loss, mindful of his own mother's love for him".⁵⁵ Once being a "mommy's boy" Jacob makes now his own son Joseph a "daddy's boy". Thus there are some significant similarities between Rebecca-Jacob and Jacob-Joseph relationships, which confirm the previous suggestion, that Jacob's love towards Joseph is somehow dysfunctional, based on his previous experiences of loss of his loved ones. Now, Joseph's stunning passivity vis-a-vis the possessive relationship of his father puts him clearly in the position of being a life victim. Unable to decide and act on his own, protected from any harm and problems, Joseph grows as a lame duck, an emotionally handicapped individual. At the same time, as I will now show in the two subsequent sections, Joseph enjoys this status and abuses all the privileges he gained with it. He turns his victim position into a tool of oppression against his brothers.

3. Self-centeredness

In this section I will show Joseph's narcissistic tendencies which, on the one hand, are caused by Jacob's preferential love and, on the other, which deepen the rivalry between the brothers. Joseph is a spoiled brat, totally self-centered, seeing and believing the whole world to dance around him and worship him like god. Such twisted self esteem and idealistic view on himself prevents him from discovering his true identity. At the same time it is an obstacle in becoming autonomous, as all his actions are motivated by this disordered and sick desire to be the first. I will demonstrate that Joseph is completely absorbed with his narcissistic dreams and has no intention whatsoever to change it. In consequence his self-centeredness leads to the situation of death.

The main narrative device used to present Joseph's twisted self esteem is his dreams (37:5-11). Robert Alter demonstrates that they are a second revelation of Joseph's character,

⁵⁵ Lowenthal, *The Joseph Narrative in Genesis*, 16.

underlining his "adolescent narcissism."⁵⁶ He says that the role of the dreams is purely secular, showing Joseph's hidden desires and his self-perception. It is clear as the main feature of Joseph's dreams is their egocentric character. Joseph imagines all his family bowing before him. Even more than bowing! The verb *הרה* is usually used in reference to an act of reverence towards deities. Joseph went too far in believing in his own superiority, which made worried even Jacob (37:10). Moreover, as Alter notes carefully, the expression "Listen, I pray" (37:6) as well as the triple use of *הִנֵּה* in the dream descriptions (37:7.9) stresses Joseph's self absorbed excitement even further.⁵⁷

I believe this self-centeredness to be caused by Jacob's preferential love. As Guyette points out, "it is not likely that this sense of superiority is an original thought that springs up spontaneously in Joseph's imagination. It is more likely that it comes in some measure from Jacob."⁵⁸ The detailed analysis of Jacob's relationship towards Joseph performed above justifies such claim. Joseph is protected by Jacob in every respect and distinguished between the brothers. He serves his father as a substitute for his lost mother and wife and Jacob is putting every effort to make sure that nothing wrong can happen to his beloved son. This is what makes Joseph such a spoiled, overconfident brat. He is abusing his favorable and protective status, believing in his own importance without limits. Joseph is one of the youngest brothers but aspires to be the first among them. This twisted self esteem has a very clear source and is understandable only when we look at his relationship with the father. Zakovitch also points out that Jacob's later reaction to

⁵⁶ Alter, *Genesis*, 208.

⁵⁷ Alter, 209–10.

⁵⁸ Guyette, "Joseph's Emotional Development," 181.

Joseph's hubris and narcissism is ambiguous.⁵⁹ On the one hand he rebukes him, on the other he takes these dreams seriously, as he himself had serious dreams before.

4. Rivalry

The last constraint on Joseph's journey towards autonomy and authenticity is the rivalry between the brothers. It is the strongest of all constraints as it leads directly to Joseph's death. It leads Joseph into slavery and a state of non-existence. Even though all the rivalry can be traced between all the brothers, only Joseph pushed it to the limits, bringing on himself a threat of death. Because of his twisted self esteem, confidence in his relationship with the father, Joseph acts boldly against his brothers, provoking them to make an alliance against the cocky spoiled brat.

4.1. Brothers' anger

I will begin by describing the context of rivalry and the anger which lead Joseph into slavery. From the very beginning we can see that the relationship between Joseph and his brothers is ambiguous, oscillating between being superior and inferior. First of all, the narrator introduces Joseph as a seventeen year old boy, a shepherd (37:2). The biblical authors usually describe someone's job as a shepherd of a particular flock with an expression:

רָעָה אֶת־צֹאן

(Gen 4:2, 30:36, Ex 3:1)

In this unique case, however, Joseph is instead introduced as a:

רָעָה אֶת־אֶחָיו בְּצֹאן

(Gen 37:2)

⁵⁹ Zakovitch, *Jacob*, 154.

Now, the wording and the structure of both verses is same and thus one may read it as follows: "the watcher of his brothers among the sheep" instead of "the watcher of the sheep". This line, though, is usually translated as "he was watching sheep with his brothers". The issue here is the Hebrew particle אִתּוֹ which, even though written in the same way, either means "with" or serves the function of the direct object marker.⁶⁰ Now, the idea of Joseph pasturing his brothers may sound absurd. Nevertheless the structure of the sentence surprises and insinuates that Joseph may be placed in a superior position over his brothers and he may be watching them closely.

This first statement is immediately followed by a disjunctive *waw*, which means an introduction of another statement in opposition to the previous one. This time, the narrator states, that Joseph was a אֶפְסָרָא , i.e., as Alter puts it, "an apprentice shepherd", which stresses his subordinate role among other shepherds,⁶¹ a subject of the sons of his father's maid servants. Now, this seemingly contradictory statements may be ascribed to two different sources and two different versions of the story. It is possible, however, that such contradiction and ambiguity is maintained by the redactor intentionally in order to draw attention to Joseph's ambiguous status in the family, i.e., oscillating between being inferior and superior among the brothers, which has also been observed by André Wénin.⁶² Even more interesting is that in this verse Joseph's brothers are not called directly "his brothers", as in a previous statement, but their connection to Joseph is presented all the way round: the sons of the wives of his father. As Berlin points out, the way of referring to particular characters is crucial in the story. It is not a random choice, but

⁶⁰ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 84–86.

⁶¹ Alter, *Genesis*, 208.

⁶² Wénin, *Giuseppe o l'invenzione della fratellanza*, 23.

rather a carefully planned decision which points out the relationship between the characters.⁶³ From these two statements it follows that, firstly, Joseph oscillates between an inferior and a superior position in the family and, secondly, that his relationship with his brothers is somewhat cold and distant. The only thing that maintains their relationship is Jacob, their common father. The same damaged relationship can be observed through the eyes of Joseph's brothers (37:18). The scene in Shechem opens with a shift of perspective, which is a very popular device among biblical authors.⁶⁴ The fact that the narrator notes, that Joseph was distant from his brothers, is not an objective neutral observation. The shift to brothers' perspective means that it is *them* for whom Joseph is distant. *They* see him from the *distance*, before he even manages to *draw near* to them. All of these observations show a problematic background of Joseph's family and help us understand the violence and oppression which emerges within it.

There are two reasons for brothers' hatred and violence: Joseph's dreams, which are an expression of his self-centeredness, and his tunic, which is a token of Joseph's favorable status.⁶⁵ Brother's violence against dreams is clearly visible in the scene in Shechem. The brothers call Joseph ironically "the lord of the *dreams*" (37:19) and they are "curious" what will happen to his *dreams* after they kill him (37:20). Another interesting wordplay supports this conclusion. There is a similarity between the name Joseph and a root verb רָסַח , which is translated "to continue".⁶⁶ It is well known that names in Biblical narratives are used for a purpose and very often serve to show something more.⁶⁷ Joseph's dreams cause his brothers to *continue* to reject him even more (Gen 37:8).

⁶³ Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 14.

⁶⁴ Sonnet, "L'analisi narrativa dei racconti biblici," 70.

⁶⁵ Rad, *Genesis*, 350.

⁶⁶ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 414–15.

⁶⁷ Linafelt, *Ruth*, 2.

וְיוֹסֵפוֹ עוֹד שָׁנָא אֹתוֹ עַל־חִלְמֹתָיו וְעַל־דְּבָרָיו

In other words, the brothers are "josephing" to reject Joseph. It is thus Joseph's self-centeredness, his twisted self esteem, and overconfidence of his quality, that make his brothers angry (37:11). The second trigger of brothers' violence towards Joseph is his unique tunic (37:3). The tunic, as well as the relationship of אהב, cause Joseph's brothers to reject (שנא) Joseph (37:4). שנא and אהב are usually put together as opposing each other on the same semantic continuum.⁶⁸ By choosing or preferring one thing, one necessarily rejects all other things. It is an either-or situation, which recalls the blessing stolen by Jacob from Esau. Only one can be chosen, only one can be blessed. Thus Jacob's preference, symbolized by the tunic, puts all his other brothers in a condition of not-chosen, disallowed, rejected or, at least, put in a second place. As soon as Joseph joins his brothers in Shechem, they strip him of his tunic (37:23). It is a surprising event, not expected by the reader. With all the suspense of the scene, the description of brothers' anger and their plans of assassination, we see brothers' violence being unleashed against... the tunic! There was no mention of the tunic in brothers' plans. Such composition of the story is probably designed to surprise a reader and point out to a significant, if not central, detail in the plot.⁶⁹ Victor Matthews in his detailed article shows that this act of violence against the tunic is a negation or reversal of the ceremony of investiture, performed earlier by Jacob.⁷⁰ In other words, the brothers countermand the whole meaning of Jacob's act. This detail strengthens the message of the final scene, when the brothers stain Joseph's tunic with blood of the slaughtered goat and bring it back to Jacob (37:32). It may be the case that the brothers returned the tunic, stained with blood, to Jacob as an act of revenge, to hurt him for his favoritism. This act, as von Rad points out, is a

⁶⁸ Vanderhooft, "ʿAhābāh: Philological Observations on ʿāhēb/ʿahābāh in the Hebrew Bible.," 42–43.

⁶⁹ Sonnet, "L'analisi narrativa dei racconti biblici," 63.

⁷⁰ Matthews, "The Anthropology of Clothing in the Joseph Narrative," 31.

definite act to kill Joseph. Jacob's recognition of Joseph's death is a "legal solemn act" of confirmation of Joseph's death.⁷¹ Joseph is no more, he has been erased from the family life for good.

4.2. Joseph's activity

To give justice to the brothers it is necessary to say that all their anger and violence described above are but a response to Joseph's actions. While rivalry is an obvious thing among Jacob's sons, Joseph brought it to the extreme by his evil actions, spying on his brothers, letting loose his narcissism and abusing his preferential status. He became confident of his privileged position, and began to share openly with everyone his narcissistic dreams, putting himself in the center of the family. As narrator notes, Joseph's act of spying on his brothers ends with his brothers' anger and the lack of shalom, i.e., the lack of peace, harmony and integrity in the relationships. After this detail, the very next verse begins the scene featuring Joseph's dreams. It is worth noticing a wordplay used here between the words שלם and חלום (peace and dream). The previous scene ends with a word שלם while the next one begins with the word חלום (37:4-5):

וַיִּרְאוּ אָחִיו כִּי־אֵתוֹ אָהָב אֲבֵיהֶם מִכָּל־אָחָיו וַיִּשְׁנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלָם

וַיַּחְלֵם יוֹסֵף חֲלֹמֹם וַיַּגֵּד לְאָחָיו וַיּוֹסְפוּ עוֹד שְׁנֵא אֹתוֹ:

A possible interpretation of this detail is that Joseph's self-centered dreams only deepen the lack of peace in his family. They make his brothers angry and distant from him even more! The second wicked activity of Joseph is abusing his preferential status. By watching his brothers

⁷¹ Rad, *Genesis*, 354.

and spying on them in front of his father (37:2), he was strengthening his favorable position and damaging his brothers' relationship with their father. We should pay special attention that Joseph brings those bad news to *their* father. This slight detail of a third person plural possessive pronoun points out that Joseph's actions may be targeting the very relationship between the father and his sons. Finally, as in the case of possessive relationships, when brothers finally unleash their anger Joseph becomes silent. Similarly as before, Joseph turns out to be paralyzed by the situation, without abilities to defend himself.

There is one last scene which shows Joseph's activity. It is the short, mysterious scene in the middle of the episode (37:14b-17), which echoes Jacob's encounter with the divine being by the Jabbok ford (32:21-31). Both Jacob's and Joseph's encounters happen before meeting their brothers. Joseph is lost in the fields (37:15), wandering around (תעה). The root תעה also means to err, to be confused.⁷² Joseph suddenly finds himself detached from his father and his brothers and does not know where to go. In this moment of confusion a mysterious man appears. We are not told who the man is, but we know, firstly, that he is neutral in all this situation and, secondly, that he knows how to lead Joseph to his brothers. In his state of confusion and loneliness Joseph asks the man for help and says "I am looking for my brothers" (37:16). This question as well as the place of the scene, i.e., the fields, resemble God's question to Cain, after the murder of Abel in the fields: "Where is your brother?" It is worth noticing the exact order of Joseph's words, as they are written in Hebrew: "It is my brothers I am looking for."

אֶת־אֲחֵי אֲנֹכִי מִבְּקֶשׁ

⁷² Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1073.

In his statement Joseph puts his brothers at the first place, as if he had realized their importance. It may be a moment of Joseph's initial conversion, the opening of his eyes to see that he is not the only one in the world. He is not God, he is not the center of the family, he is not the first one.

5. Identity

This section is devoted in particular to Joseph's identity in order to trace how it develops throughout the story. In the beginning of the story we are given two clues about Joseph's character. They are, as Alter puts it, is a tattletale and an adolescent narcissist.⁷³ As I have shown above, both of these features are caused by Jacob's particular relationship to Joseph, which is symbolized by the unique tunic with which Jacob dressed Joseph (37:3). This tunic, as an outer garment, is like a label distinguishing Joseph in the household and society. As I have quoted before, Matthews points out a significant meaning attached to clothing, and their importance in identifying a character as an individual and as a member of the group.⁷⁴ Thus this tunic is like a screaming label on Joseph's forehead, saying "I am daddy's boy". Jacob labeled Joseph as the favorite one, the preferred one, the chosen one and this is Joseph's initial false identity, with which he begins his journey towards freedom and truth.

6. Solution

The final object of the analysis of this episode is the solution of the problem. What strikes in the first episode is that the situation in the household seems to be impossible to solve. The relationships between the characters are profoundly twisted to the point that any intention of solving the problem only makes it worse. First of all Jacob himself is concerned about Joseph's self-centeredness and decides to send him alone to his brothers (37:14). Unfortunately this

⁷³ Alter, *Genesis*, 208.

⁷⁴ Matthews, "The Anthropology of Clothing in the Joseph Narrative," 26–30.

decision comes too late as the conflict has grown to such a degree that this solution is simply naive and risky. Leaving Joseph alone with brothers who hate him so much cannot end up well. Other solutions are sought by Joseph's brothers. Some of them want to murder Joseph, Ruben wants to throw him into a pit and bring him back to the father, Judah proposes to sell him away as a slave. We know already from the story of Cain and Abel (Gen 4) that murder does not give a solution to the problem of rivalry or jealousy. Ruben's idea, on the other hand, is egoistic as he wants to reclaim the status of the firstborn, which is just a continuation of the rivalry issue.⁷⁵ Moreover, bringing Joseph back to Jacob in secret would not resolve the situation, as the family conflict would continue to escalate at home. The only reasonable way out of the conflict is to remove Joseph from the family. Ironically, Joseph's brothers do not manage to sell Joseph to Ishmaelites, as they are anticipated by a random group of Midianites coming out of nowhere (37:28). Now, the inconsistency between Ishmaelites and Midianites in this story is ascribed to the two versions of the story. In the one version Judah sold Joseph to Ishmaelites, in the second version Ruben his Joseph in the pit but the Midianites took him out and left. I think that the final version with its inconsistency makes perfect sense. If Judah was the one who sold Joseph, he himself would bear responsibility and sense of guilt. The surprising intervention of Midianites somehow takes a burden of guilt from Judah and the brothers. It is not by their plans and decisions that Joseph goes down to Egypt. It is by the intervention of the third neutral party, which undoes human plans and brings solution to the complicated family situation. Interestingly, a similar intervention of a neutral third party was visible in the short episode when Joseph was wandering in confusion in the wilderness. A nameless and faceless character comes as a help and shows him a way towards his brothers.

⁷⁵ Clifford, "Genesis 37-50: Joseph Story of Jacob Story?," 218.

In summary, the situation in the story is presented as impossible to solve. All the actions of the characters only deepen the problem, instead of resolving it. This episode shows, that the only solution to such a critical situation is an intervention from the outside. It comes as a surprise, independently from the characters involved in the conflict. It is completely neutral, without name or face, without any kind of relationship with the characters in the story. It comes only for a brief moment to solve the problem and then leave the stage. It can be seen as God himself, a rabbi, a new friend or any person who intentionally or unintentionally can provide solution to the situation.

7. Summary

In this chapter I have demonstrated Joseph's condition in Jacob's household. He begins his journey being paralyzed and overwhelmed by three constraints. The first of them is the possessive relationship which he suffers from his father. The consequence of it is Joseph's twisted self esteem in the form of narcissistic self-centeredness which is the second constraint. These two ultimately lead to rivalry, which as an ultimate constraint brings Joseph close to death. I have demonstrated that the situation in the household is grave, because none of the characters is able to solve it. Every action seems to make everything worse. The only solution in this unsolvable setting is the intervention of the third party, which can be observed in two scenes: a mysterious person in the fields, who shows Joseph the way, and a group of Midianites, who bring him out of the pit and take him away from his brothers.. Thus the practical guideline presented in the first episode is the necessity of the third neutral party to get involved into the situation from the outside and enable a change.

8. Appendix - Judah's Household

There has been a long and ongoing debate whether chapter 38 is part of the story or rather an interruption of it. Even though Joseph does not play any role in it, and therefore it would fall outside of the scope of this paper, it still covers same themes of autonomy, authenticity and constraints. In this short section I am going to demonstrate the same themes which I analyze throughout the paper, that is possessive relationships, rivalry, self-centeredness and identity. I will show that these are the very same themes present in the whole narrative. By doing this I will contribute to the debate arguing for the unity and coherency of the whole cycle, including chapter 38.

First of all, it is worth noticing that the episode itself shares the same setting as others. It is another household setting with Judah being the authority ruling over it. Similarly to Jacob, Judah's relationship to his youngest son Shelah is clingy and possessive. Because of the death of two older sons (38:7.10), Judah becomes very protective with Shelah, "locks" him at home in order to save him from death (38:11). Another example of possessive relationship is the one suffered by Tamar. No one directly clings to her in a way as, e.g., Potiphar's wife clings to Joseph later on, nevertheless she is treated in the story as an object or a tool. Firstly as a means to bring offspring to Er (38:6.8) and, secondly, she is perceived as a prostitute, providing sexual service (38:15). In summary, she mirrors back Joseph's situation in the episode, being a silent victim, letting herself be abused and sent away from the stage. Both Shelah and Tamar are silent objects of possessive relationships.

The theme of rivalry is also very present. We see two older brothers who were wicked in the eyes of the Lord and this is why they have lost the right of the firstborn (by dying). This

mirrors the situation of Simeon and Ruben. The main reason for Onan's wickedness was precisely jealousy and rivalry (38:9). He did not want to contribute to the line of his brother, probably wanting to be the first himself. The rivalry ends up in death, similarly as in the previous chapter (38:7.10). The theme comes back again at the end of the episode, when the twins were competing to be the firstborn (38:28-30). As for self-centeredness, it is closely associated with rivalry in this episode. The first explicitly self-centered character is Onan, as I have just demonstrated. The second one is Judah himself, who he recognizes at the end of the episode: "she is more right than I am!" (38:26). As Richard Clifford point out, "Judah is a one-man show, making all the decisions with little regard for others and for family traditions".⁷⁶ This the chapter shows a process of transformation of Judah, who from being a heel turns out to become a hero later on in the story.⁷⁷

Finally, the theme of identity is significant in this episode. There are two instances of labeling, which mirror back Jacob labeling Joseph with the special tunic. First of them is Judah sending Tamar away and ordering her to "remain a widow" (38:8), which is later associated with widow garment (38:14). He labels her as lost and her relationship he labels to be dead. Contrary to Joseph's unique tunic, the widow garment serves the purpose of removing Tamar from the family and keep his youngest son safe. The second instance is binding of the crimson thread around the hand of the twin (38:28). This ironic image is a token of the rivalry and symbolizes the obsession to claim the birthright.

Apart from labeling, we also see elements of clothing used as an instrument towards a particular purpose. Tamar is removing the label given by Judah (widow garment) and putting on

⁷⁶ Clifford, 220.

⁷⁷ Clifford, 221.

a disguise (false identity) to fight for her rights (38:14). Moreover, by doing this, she strips Judah from his signet, cord and staff - tokens of power in the household (38:16-18). With her clever plan and initiative she persuades the authority to act according to her plan and she easily takes his power for herself. This action of Tamar foreshadows Joseph's disguise and initiative which grants him the signet and power of the Pharaoh later on in the story (41:14,42-45).

Finally, it is important to mention one verb *leitwort* which connects all the episodes and always appears in relation to clothing, labels or disguise. Thus it is always connected to the issue of identity and authenticity. This word is נָכַר, which means "to recognize". In the first episode Jacob is asked by his sons to recognize the tunic of Joseph (37:32) and he recognizes it with pain and crying (37:33). In chapter 38 Judah is asked by Tamar to recognize his items (38:25) and he recognizes them with the contrite heart and regret (38:26). Finally, when brothers visit Joseph in Egypt, he recognizes them (42:7) but treats them as strangers (same root), while they do not recognize him (42:8). Jacob's recognition could have been a moment of recognition of his own mistake, as I have shown above. Judah's recognition is for sure a moment of conversion and realization of his own mistakes. Thus for both Jacob and Judah a moment of recognition was a moment of achieving authenticity to some degree. For Joseph, however, it is not. The moment of recognition achieves an opposite effect, which is marked by flipping the meaning of the same root. After recognizing his brothers he acts as a stranger. Contrary to previous recognition scenes, Joseph has to undergo a longer process until he can really achieve authenticity.

In terms of solution, this chapter mirrors same guidelines as all other episodes put together, which is another argument for the coherency of the chapters. The fate of Tamar is very similar to Joseph's. She was labeled and removed from the family, staying years in isolation, being a widow, i.e., a person whose relationships and future are marked by death. While being

there she comes up with a plan and takes initiative to change her future. On the other hand Judah himself resembles also the fate of Joseph. Going down to a foreign land, breaking with tradition by marrying a foreign woman,⁷⁸ at the end of the story recognizes the truth about himself and converts. I think that in the story overall Tamar can be viewed as a third party who radically influenced the course of events and ultimately enabled Joseph to make his final step towards authenticity. As Richard Clifford points out, the recognition line of Judah labels Tamar as "the righteous one", which should be understood as "the one who is doing the will of God".⁷⁹ She was the reason for which Judah recognized the truth about himself and repented. This event was for him life changing and, as many scholars point out, inspired him to perform that famous final speech in the last episode. That very speech, as I will show later, pierced through Joseph's mask, made him embrace his past and enabled him to become authentic. This final event is ascribed by Joseph himself to a third party, i.e., God, but we can see that it begun here with Tamar. A clever, maltreated, foreign widow which turned out to be the only just person in the story, a gentle finger of God fulfilling his plans.

In summary, the analysis of our themes in chapter 38 shows that it is very much a coherent and organic part of the whole story. Not only does it present same themes and mirrors back or foreshadows other events, but also contributes to the proper understanding of other chapters, especially the climactic scene of Joseph's admitting to his true identity in chapter 45.

⁷⁸ Clifford, 219.

⁷⁹ Clifford, 220.

Chapter II: Potiphar's Household

1. Setting the stage

In this second episode I will demonstrate how the constraints of possessive relationships, self-centeredness and rivalry continue in Joseph's story. I will show that in this episode the problem with possessive relationships is ultimately resolved with Joseph recognizing a limit for abusing others and setting a boundary against being abused himself. At the same time, Joseph recognizes limits to his self-centeredness and learns for the first time that he is *second*, and not first. His self-centeredness, though, is not fully resolved yet. Despite these changes, Joseph In this episodes, despite his progress and attempts to fight actively for his autonomy, Joseph still falls victim to rivalry and ends up in the situation of slavery. As for his identity, while discovering his true self, Joseph is tempted to forge for himself an alternative Egyptian identity. This is the most dynamic of the episodes and there are a good few messages I will derive from it in the last section.

2. Possessive Relationship

In this section I will demonstrate how the constraint of possessive relationships develops in Joseph's journey. Faced by a nagging, intrusive and clingy relationship of Potiphar's wife, Joseph reacts in two ways. On the one hand he recognizes limits to his power and refuses to abuse it. On the other hand he sets clear boundaries and, when crossed, detaches himself radically, putting his position and status in jeopardy. I will argue that it is a significant change, comparing to the previous episode and it resolves the constraint of possessive relationships in Joseph's journey. From being passive and dependent, Joseph becomes defensive and radical, fighting for his autonomy and defending his boundaries .

2.1. Sexual Harassment

The scene of sexual abuse is introduced by the mention of Joseph's unique beauty, which is presented as a trigger for the whole *peripeteia* (39:6). The physical description is not a popular one in the Hebrew Bible. Whenever it occurs, a reader should be attentive that it is crucial for the further development of the plot.⁸⁰ The beauty of Joseph makes us think of the unique tunic from the previous episode, which was an object of brothers' violence. This time Potiphar's wife was observing Joseph, got attracted to him and "attacked" him ordering: "Lie with me!" (39:7). It is far from a polite invitation, and thus indicates some form of violence. Alter demonstrates this line of Potiphar's wife as an important "revelatory initial dialogue", i.e., a particular narrative device, which presents the main feature of character's personality by the means of his or her first words.⁸¹ The oppressing character of woman's desire is underlined further on by her continuous insistence throughout days (39:10). As Matthews points out,⁸² basing on the cultural and ethnographic analysis of Abu-Lughod,⁸³ Joseph recognizes in this situation "both its honor-shattering implications and the 'dependence' position sexual relations with his master's wife would create." This strange romantic relationship and risk of dependence makes us think of Joseph's protective and clingy relationship he had to endure from his father's side. Such connection is strengthened further more by juxtaposition of both pieces of clothing with expressions of these clingy relationships. In the first episode the first mention of Joseph's unique tunic was juxtaposed with the verb אהב (38:3), being a token of this preferential relationship. In the second episode, similarly, the first mention of the garment is juxtaposed with woman's words "Lie with me!" Once more Joseph becomes an object of someone's possessive desire. In this tense atmosphere,

⁸⁰ Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 34–35.

⁸¹ Alter, *Genesis*, 225.

⁸² Matthews, "The Anthropology of Clothing in the Joseph Narrative," 32.

⁸³ Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*, 148.

after some time, the woman decides to act quickly and decisively. She finds Joseph alone and assaults him (39:12). As the narrator notes carefully, she grasps him by his garment saying again "Lie with me!" The choice of the word is interesting. The word תפס, "to grasp",⁸⁴ expresses an action of holding something in one's hand, to control, to possess, to close someone in one's own hand. It indicates a possessive character of the relationship this woman has towards Joseph.

Thus the first form of constraints suffered by Joseph in this episode is the possessive and clingy relationship of Potiphar's wife, which was expressed with her nagging invitation to a sexual intercourse. And, as we will see below, once more the source of the problem is the label put on Joseph by the Potiphar. The woman got attracted to Joseph's position in the household and this is why she grasps the garment first.

2.2. Joseph's Activity

Comparing Joseph's passivity and dependence facing possessive relationship in the previous episode, we find this time his activity has significantly increased and we can observe his actions as an autonomous individual. The very first time we see Joseph's activity in this episode is his response to a woman's command "Lie with me!" It is worth noticing, that this is Joseph's first action since he has left his father's house. This moment presents a significant shift in Joseph's life - he is no longer a silent, passive and dependent person. Narrator recounts his response in a very brief and straightforward way: "Joseph refused" (39:8). It is not a onetime refusal from Joseph's part. As the narrator notes, Joseph remains consistent with his decision, and does not listen to woman's nagging invitation for days (39:10). Not only does he refuse to lie with her, but even to lie "next to her" and not to be "with her" at all. As in the previous episode, Joseph's refusal in verse 8 is a significant revelatory device, which defines Joseph's new life

⁸⁴ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1074.

situation. Joseph is in the state of defending himself, protecting his autonomy and setting boundaries. This first action of Joseph is his first own step in his journey towards autonomy and authenticity. It is a radical step of detachment from everyone and everything else. This radical rebellion and detachment is shown throughout the episode in many ways. From the grammatical point of analysis, the three waw consecutive verbs are stack on each other very closely, which underlines the rapid pace and strength of the action (Gen 39:7-8):

וַתֹּאמֶר שְׂכַבָה עִמִּי: וַיִּמָּאֵן | וַיֹּאמֶר

A similar observation can be made when we analyze the scene of the sexual assault. As above, Joseph's reaction is immediate and sharp, also strengthened by three waw consecutive verbs stack one upon another (Gen 39:12):

וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ בַיָּדָהּ וַיָּנָס וַיֵּצֵא

All of the three verbs used here are various forms of describing an action of detachment: he left, he fled, he run away. Once more, it underlines even further Joseph's desperate will to separate himself from the woman's desire.

3. Self-centeredness

In this section I will show Joseph's narcissistic tendencies which undergo a significant change. In a neutral context with no one to compete against Joseph learns that he is not the center of the world. Potiphar sets him a clear limit and Joseph learns to respect it. In this household Joseph learns an important lesson, that he is *second*. This issue, however, is not fully resolved in

this episode. Joseph is still absorbed by his skills, intelligence and resources, and showing off in the household. Thus the problem is carried on to the next episode.

The context of this episode is similar to the previous one. Put simply, Joseph quickly finds favor in the eyes of Potiphar, the local authority, and becomes the first servant in the household (39:2-5). Potiphar places him above the whole household and everything that belongs to him. This is very similar to the situation of favoritism in Joseph's family house. There is, however, one limit to Joseph's power. Potiphar gives Joseph everything except for the food he himself ate (39:6). This tiny detail echoes the scene in the garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve were given absolute stewardship over the garden as well as all the fruits of the trees, except for the one (2:16-17). This slight detail puts Joseph as "the second one" in the household, contrary to the situation from his family house. This detail is very rarely interpreted in this way, which is pointed out by Katie Heffelfinger, who in her article provides a detailed analysis of the food leitmotif in the Joseph's story.⁸⁵ She argues that food is an important image of power dynamics in the narrative overall. The limit set here by Potiphar makes Joseph remember the situation, when his brothers were having a meal together, while Joseph himself was imprisoned in the pit (37:24-25). Certainly an intense memory in Joseph's head, which could have been evoked by this very event and made him think again. Some scholars argue, that "being second" was Joseph's position in every household.⁸⁶ In my understanding, however, there is a slight change of Joseph's situation which is underlined by setting this particular food limit. In the previous episode, in Jacob's household there was in fact no limit to Joseph's behavior. He could have developed his fantasies and actions freely without anyone getting in his way. The fact that Jacob was disturbed by his dreams, as was already pointed out above, was not an obstacle to Joseph and was rather

⁸⁵ Heffelfinger, "From Bane to Blessing," 305.

⁸⁶ Kaminsky, "Reclaiming a Theology of Election: Favoritism and the Joseph Story," 140.

ambiguous. And even if Jacob was really unhappy with this fact, he didn't do anything to change it. What we have seen, in fact, was the opposite: Joseph could freely dream about his own father bowing before him.

Even though Joseph made some progress to turn away from self-centeredness, there are some indications, that he is still struggling with some sort of narcissism and being absorbed by himself. First of all, the relationship with Potiphar's wife and its result are very similar to what has happened before in Jacob's house. These little similarities open a possibility that Joseph himself provoked Potiphar's wife's actions, exactly as he has provoked such reactions in his own brothers. James Kugel in his book "In Potiphar's House" analyses this scene in detail and point out that Joseph is an obvious "dandy" in the household.⁸⁷ Following rabbinic tradition, he analyzes the opening phrase in verse 7: "after these things" and points out that "these things" are "some very conscious primping".⁸⁸

In summary, in the family house Joseph felt like god, dreaming about everyone, including the head of the household, bowing before him. He was the first one. But not anymore. Joseph is still the preferred one, but his power is not absolute, there is a limit to it. Potiphar's favoritism is somehow similar to the one we have seen previously in Joseph's home. This time, however, it is not the relationship of אהב that placed Joseph in the favorable position. Nor is it Joseph's mother or his birth that secured him the favor. It is rather his successful work, assisted by God, as the narrator reminds us. Joseph turns out to be a hardworking brilliant young man, with good

⁸⁷ Kugel, *In Potiphar's House*, 76–79.

⁸⁸ Kugel, 78.

management skills. Joseph's is still self-absorbed, believing that he got all the privileges and favors only because of how smart he is.⁸⁹

4. Rivalry

In this section I will demonstrate another relationship of rivalry which again removed Joseph from the stage and brought him into slavery. In this episode we can observe Joseph's initial conversion and change in regard to rivalry. Compared to the previous episode, Joseph recognizes the damaging consequences of rivalry and refuses to follow this logic. He restrains himself from abusing his power, which nevertheless brings him back to prison and slavery. Faced by woman's intrigue, Joseph becomes again passive and obedient, not able to stand his ground and defend himself.

4.1. Intrigue

The theme of rivalry in this episode is not a popular one in biblical scholarship. The role of Potiphar's wife is usually reduced to sexual harassment, seducing young Joseph and covering up her evil motivations. What I want to show is the ambiguity of woman's motivations hiding behind her activity. There is a possibility that her intrigue and seduction was just a means in a bigger struggle for power in Potiphar's household. Such reading matches the overall theme of rivalry in Joseph's story as well as it contributes to the argument of this paper.

The bigger picture of the power struggle within Potiphar's household can be inferred from the analysis of Potiphar's wife speeches (39:14-19). It appears that the sexual desire was not the only motivation for her action. The whole section describing the intrigue, from a graphic point of view, is an interesting mosaic of a limited number of words and expressions. We can distinguish

⁸⁹ Kaminsky, "Reclaiming a Theology of Election: Favoritism and the Joseph Story," 139.

here three different versions of the same story. The differences between them tell us a lot about woman's intentions and the power dynamics in the house.⁹⁰ The first version, the actual one, is told by the narrator, the second is told by the woman to other servants, and the third is told also by the woman to her husband Potiphar. Let us have a look at these stories and compare the themes and words used in all of them:

The narrators version:

וּתְתַפְּשֶׂהוּ בַּבְּגָדוֹ לֵאמֹר שְׂכֻבָה עִמִּי וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיֵּנֶס וַיֵּצֵא הַחֹצֵצָה:

What did the woman see:

וַיְהִי כִּי רָאוּתָהּ כִּי-עֹזֵב בְּגָדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיֵּנֶס הַחֹצֵצָה
וַתִּקְרָא לְאֹנְשֵׁי בֵּיתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לֵאמֹר

What did she tell servants:

רְאוּ תָבִיא לָנוּ אִישׁ עֵבְרִי לְצַחֵק בָּנוּ בָּא אֵלַי לְשֻׁכַּב עִמִּי וַאֲקַרָּא בְּקוֹל גְּדוֹל:
וַיְהִי כִשְׂמַעוּ כִּי-הָרִימְתִי קוֹלִי וַאֲקַרָּא וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ אֶצְלִי וַיֵּנֶס וַיֵּצֵא הַחֹצֵצָה:

The narrators note:

וַתִּגַּח בְּגָדוֹ אֶצְלָהּ עַד-כִּי פָּא אֲדַגְּנוּ אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ:
וַתִּדְבַּר אֵלָיו כַּדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֵאמֹר

What did she tell her husband:

בְּאֵ-אֵלִי הַעֲבַד הָעֵבְרִי אֲשֶׁר-הִבֵּאתָ לָנוּ לְצַחֵק בִּי
וַיְהִי כִּפְהִימִי קוֹלִי וַאֲקַרָּא וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ אֶצְלִי וַיֵּנֶס הַחֹצֵצָה

There are a few thing to observe here. First of all, the woman is consistent in both of her versions saying that Joseph fled after she screamed (39:14.18), whereas in reality it was other way round (39:13-14). Interestingly, her first story, delivered to other servants, is aimed against Potiphar. She begins the whole speech by blaming Potiphar before his slaves for bringing Joseph to the household (39:14). In other words, she says that it is Potiphar who has caused the insult. Interestingly, she says it in the plural form: "Joseph insulted *us*", extending Joseph's insult to all her listeners. Thus, her speech is intended to damage the relationship between Potiphar and his slaves. Interestingly, this echoes Joseph's bringing bad report on his brothers in the first episode.

⁹⁰ Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 47–59.

In her speech she refers to Joseph as "a Hebrew" (39:14). It may be the case that this is the main problem she had with Joseph. As we will see later on in the story, a Hebrew's presence at the table was for Egyptians insulting (43:32). The version of the story recounted to the servants (39:14-15) is more elaborate than the one recounted to her husband (39:17-18). More precisely, it includes a much longer description of her cry for help as well as the crucial detail about the insult itself: it was a sexual assault. In summary, she clearly presents herself to the servants as a victim of sexual violence and extrapolates this insult to the whole household. The target of her speech is the nationality of Joseph and the leadership of Potiphar.

Now, the second version of her story, addressed to Potiphar, is much simpler, as she skipped the sexual context of the story. She underlines again Joseph's Hebrew identity (39:17), as she did previously. But this time she also refers to him as *the* slave, stressing it with a definite article. She says: "Came to me *the* slave. *The* Hebrew. *The* one you brought to us." Interestingly, she has grasped and removed one label from Joseph a (successful man of power) and replaced it with another (a slave foreigner). It is an interesting shift, as the rivalry in the whole story oscillates between the positions of being a master or a slave. She seems to be unhappy with who Joseph became in the household. She clearly stresses in front of Potiphar Joseph's *real* status: a slave, a foreigner, an "item" you bought and brought home. And, she concludes saying that "this item is an insult to me." This time she uses a singular pronoun, presenting herself as the only victim of the insult. From her speech we can conclude, that her intention is to remove Joseph from his privileged position in the household. She clearly attacks the relationship between Potiphar and Joseph and underlines Joseph's status as a slave and a foreigner.

One more detail is worth mentioning in woman's versions of the story. The narrator states twice that Joseph left the garment in her hand (39:12). The woman, however, tells everyone that

he left the garment "next to her" (39:15.18). One obvious explanation would be that she wanted to underline Joseph's own decision to remove the garment, rather than her violent act of grasping it on him. If the above analysis of the symbolic meaning of the garment is correct, however, the deeper meaning underneath this action would be Joseph's decision to disdain his power and position, abandon his duties and privileges as an overseer of his master's household. Such ungratefulness would be a big insult to the master and a big disappointment. This mirrors the situation from the previous chapter, when the brothers brought the unique tunic to Jacob. In both cases the label is returned to the one who forged it, in order to cut the relationship between the author and the bearer. The whole situation makes Potiphar angry and, consequently, Joseph ends up in prison (39:20).

I have performed all this analysis in order to demonstrate an alternative version of woman's motivations behind the act of seducing. The ambiguity of intention as well as the details present in her speeches suggest that she treated Joseph as a rival and was trying to weaken his position in the household in order to get it for herself.

4.2. Joseph's Activity

Before I mention Joseph's response to rivalry in this episode it is worth recalling that probably he has provoked it himself, as he did in the previous episode with his brothers. As I have demonstrated in the section devoted to Joseph's self-centeredness, it is very likely that Joseph was showing off in the household, shining as a star, proud of his intelligence, talents and outstanding management skills. Such self-absorbed behavior could have provoked Potiphar's wife to both seduction and rivalry.

Joseph's radical act of separation and rebellion, presented in this episode, is accompanied by a particular cognitive change. The previous events and current context of Potiphar's household led to Joseph's conversion and change in thinking. We can observe this changes by analyzing the strangely long monologue, which Joseph utters in response to woman's brief and direct order (39:7-9). In this monologue Joseph is quoting all the lines recounted previously by the narrator in verses 4-6, which describes Joseph's position in the household. This long monologue, though, can be put shortly into a simple statement: "I am second". Joseph recognizes his power and position in the household but, at the same time, he recognizes the limits to this power. This limits, however, seem to be inconsistent in Joseph's speech. He says that Potiphar gave him everything except for his own *wife*. But this is not true. If we look back three verses above, the narrator uses the exact same words and structure, saying that Potiphar gave him everything except for the *food* he ate (Gen 39:6.9), not *wife*:

וַיַּעֲזֹב כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ בְּיַד-יוֹסֵף וְלֹא-יָדַע אֹתוֹ מֵאֹמֶה כִּי אִם-תִּלְחָם אֲשֶׁר-הוּא אוֹכֵל
 אֵינְנוּ גְדוֹל בְּבַיִת הַזֶּה מִמְּנֵי וְלֹא-חָשַׁד מִמְּנֵי מֵאֹמֶה כִּי אִם-אוֹתָד בְּאִשֶׁר אֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ

This slight detail about the limits tells us even more about Joseph's decision. Sexual relationship with Potiphar's wife is not a limit set by Potiphar, but one recognized and set by Joseph himself. It could have been the case that Potiphar's wife was legitimately within the power of Joseph. Egyptians, after all, were perceived by Israelites as a nation with a rather relaxed sexual code. Moreover, being a wife of the eunuch, she must have had some way of having an offspring. The majority of scholars agree that (סריס) refers to the office Potiphar holds in the Pharaoh court, rather than his sexual condition.⁹¹ There is, however, a narrative reason for which

⁹¹ Rad, *Genesis*, 355.

we can view Potiphar as a castrated official of the Pharaoh. As René Péter-Contesse demonstrates, "historically, in the Ancient Near East (...) eunuchs were considered more reliable than others, since they had no descendants to favor."⁹² In contrast with Joseph's previous household, filled with rivalry and favoritism, the house of a castrated official sets a stage of space, freedom and neutrality, in which Joseph can grow and mature as a free individual. In consequence Joseph becomes a second in charge, not because of his birth right but because of his skills and also because there are no other sons he could compete with. I agree with Péter-Contesse that it is not possible to establish with certainty whether Potiphar was castrated or not.⁹³ I think, however, that there is sufficient evidence to allow for such interpretation. Apart from Potiphar's sexual condition and the absence of sons, there is one more indication, observed by Brodie, that Potiphar had no sexual relationship with his wife. The "situation, where the master is attending only to his food, [sets up] the following event, where apparently he is not attending to his wife."⁹⁴ All of these observations explain the subsequent anger and frustration of Potiphar's wife, directed against Potiphar himself. What is important for the understanding of Joseph's decision is that there is a possibility that it was legitimate for Joseph to answer to her "invitation" and have sex with her. Joseph, however, recognizes such act as an abuse of power and favorable position he has received in the household. It is the opposite of what Joseph was doing in his father's house. Being the "daddy's son", Joseph was abusing his position by spying on his brothers and telling his father bad things about them. What we see here is Joseph's maturation as a person and his decision to change. The link between the two households and situations is strengthened further more by Joseph's conclusion: How can I do this big evil? The word רעה (evil) was used to describe Joseph's actions against his brothers (Gen 37:2 and 39:9):

⁹² Péter-Contesse, "Was Potiphar a Eunuch?," 142.

⁹³ Péter-Contesse, 146.

⁹⁴ Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 368.

וַיָּבֹא יוֹסֵף אֶת־דְּבַרְתֶּם רָעָה אֶל־אֲבִיהֶם
וְאִידָּ אַעֲשֶׂה הָרָעָה הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת

One final remark has to be made. After Joseph's struggle for freedom from the possessive relationship, he eventually falls victim to the rivalry. He loses the battle with Potiphar's wife and once again remains silent until the end of the episode. Apart from this final stage of silence, Joseph's activity in this episode has increased significantly. The main theme of his activity is a radical detachment, underlined by the immediacy of many short verbs of a wide semantic variety: he refused, he left, he fled, he went out. These are a response to the woman's possessive act of "grasping".

5. Identity

In this section I will demonstrate how Joseph's identity was changing since the last episode and what is its current state. As we have seen in the previous episode, Joseph's tunic was a token of his favorable position, a label given by his father. In the second episode another piece of cloth is introduced - a garment, which is a token of Joseph's position in the household, his talents and outstanding skills and intelligence. As Matthews points out, Joseph's garment in this episode is a distinct marker of his social status and position in the household, being an explicit sign and even tool of his power as a second master of the house.⁹⁵ It is another label he was given: "the star". The relationship between the garment and power was partly presented above in the discussion of the Potiphar's wife speech. There is one more narrative detail which may support the thesis that Joseph's garment is a token the power and position he has gained in the household. We can observe a parallel structure and similar wording between verses 6 and 12:

⁹⁵ Matthews, "The Anthropology of Clothing in the Joseph Narrative," 31–32.

וַיַּעֲזֹב כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ בְּיַד-יוֹסֵף

וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ

While detaching himself from the woman, Joseph mimics the wording and structure of an action of Potiphar, who gave him all the power in the household. If woman's motivation was to strip Joseph from his power and get it for herself, then the symbolic dimension of the garment signifying power and privileged status is confirmed. It is also worth noticing that in this episode Joseph himself removes the label (garment) which was given to him by Potiphar (39:12). He takes a risk and decides to remove his label together with all of its benefits, in order to remain autonomous. This act of "stripping oneself" from power and social position is strengthened even further by the fact, that (בגד) is an undergarment, which means that Joseph run away on the street naked (39:12).⁹⁶ Thus, in summary, in this episode Joseph moved from being "the star" to being naked and ashamed.

There is one more detail concerning Joseph's identity in this episode. As some scholars point out, Joseph's encounter with Potiphar's wife foreshadows or maybe even provokes his romance with Egyptian culture and forging for himself an "Egyptian mask". Despite the obvious action of detachment, Joseph's relationship with Potiphar's wife is not entirely transparent. As Kaminsky argues, basing on Kugel's analysis, Joseph was not fully innocent in the scene of seduction in the Potiphar's house.⁹⁷ First of all, Joseph was alone in the house while all other servants were away. The narrator mentions explicitly that he remained to do his work, and narrator's voice should be treated as objective truth in the story. We do not know, however, if this work was necessary and if it was not just an excuse. It is possible that Joseph was in a place and

⁹⁶ Rad, *Genesis*, 366.

⁹⁷ Kaminsky, "Reclaiming a Theology of Election: Favoritism and the Joseph Story," 139.

time he should not have been. It brings to mind the opening verse of David's love story with Batsheba, when David remained home while all other kings would go to war (2 Sam 11). In his article Levinson argues that the text describes a particular day in Egyptian culture, i.e., the Festival of the Nile, during which all the people would gather in a theater.⁹⁸ This reading opens a possibility that Joseph was really giving in to temptation and was actively ready to answer to Potiphar's wife's invitation. As Levinson points out, basing on the rabbinic tradition, Joseph's active romance is not only a moral dilemma, but has a wider political, cultural and social context.⁹⁹ Joseph is tempted by a foreign culture and is risking to give up his true identity and be absorbed by the foreign one. The romance with Potiphar's wife foreshadows Joseph's further story in the court of the Pharaoh, where Joseph denies his true identity and gets into a romance with Egyptian culture, forging his new Egyptian identity.¹⁰⁰

I am not entirely convinced that Joseph was actively planning to meet with Potiphar's wife, as the narrative itself tells explicitly that Joseph remained at the house for work purposes. Moreover, he reacted defensively immediately after the woman begun her actions. There is, however, another clue that can support the idea that the relationship with Potiphar's wife motivated Joseph to give up his identity and put on an Egyptian mask. As we have seen in woman's speeches, Joseph was attacked as a "Hebrew" and his nationality was used against him. Joseph could have reflected on that event, realized his "national weakness" and decided to put on an Egyptian mask, which we will see shortly.

⁹⁸ Levinson, "An-Other Woman Joseph and Potiphar's Wife: Staging the Body Politic," 275.

⁹⁹ Levinson, "An-Other Woman Joseph and Potiphar's Wife: Staging the Body Politic."

¹⁰⁰ I have to admit that this traditional rabbinic reading of Joseph's romance helped me realize that the next episode shows Joseph's romance with the Egyptian culture, which I did not see before.

6. Solution

Finally, let us see what solution to the problem is presented in this episode. As we have seen, Joseph managed to resolve the problem of possessive relationship and he made some progress in fighting rivalry and his self-centeredness. Both of these changes can be viewed either as a radical detachment or setting a limit. A detachment from the other and from power and setting a limit to being abused and to abuse. Contrary to the previous episode, it is Joseph himself who comes up with a solution to the problem. We can still trace, however, a slight intervention of the third party. Potiphar as an eunuch, as has been shown above, provides for Joseph a neutral ground for growth, without rivalry and possessive relationship from authority's side. Potiphar did not solve the problem itself, but he prepared for Joseph a healthy context for solving it.

The most explicit and dramatic solution presented in this episode is setting a limit to being abused. Joseph puts an end to clingy relationships, which begun with his father. The solution is presented as a radical act of detachment, connected with a conscious decision to give up power. According to the narrative, the problem of clingy relationships is not possible to be solved gradually. It couldn't have been solved peacefully in the family, nor could it have been solved by a mere conversation with the Potiphar's wife. In both episodes a radical detachment had to happen, earlier by the third party, now by Joseph himself. The radicalism of detachment was underlined in the story by its immediacy (putting together three verbs), force (leaving grasped garment behind), desperation (running out naked to the street) and distance (stacking of three verbs expressing distancing oneself). It is presented as an outright action which suffers no compromise. A clingy relationship has to be cut off no matter what - that's the only way to free oneself from it.

The action of detachment appears together with giving up power, which also demonstrates a solution for self-centeredness and rivalry. As I have shown, Joseph's first response to seduction was setting for himself a limit to his power, which he did not intend to abuse. Additionally, by leaving the garment behind, he left behind his position in the household together with all the power he had. This action can also be viewed as a radical detachment from power. Being ready to leave prestige and benefits behind, giving up the very thing one was striving for so much.

In summary, the episode presents Joseph's radical detachment as a solution to the problem of clingy relationships, rivalry and self-centeredness. This is his first personal step in the journey towards autonomy and authenticity. An immediate, determined and decisive action of distancing oneself from the source of constraint is the first conscious step required to be made on the journey towards autonomy and authenticity.

7. Summary

In summary, I have demonstrated how in Potiphar's household Joseph is facing the constraints of possessive relationships, self-centeredness and rivalry. Contrary to the previous episode, Joseph is finally able to struggle against them himself. Being put in the context of a neutral household (contrary to the family household) Joseph recognizes and sets limits for abusing others and being abused himself. These limits help him to solve the problem of possessive relationships once and for all. It also moves him forward in struggling against self-centeredness and rivalry, as he recognizes himself as "the second", rather than the first. Joseph solves these problems by an act of radical and desperate detachment from an abusing person as well as from his disordered desire for power. Thus, the practical guideline demonstrated in this episode is the need for radical and sharp detachment from one's current constraints

Chapter III: Pharaoh's Household

1. Setting the stage

By this time the issue of possessive relationships has been resolved and the issue of self-centeredness has moved on in Joseph's life. In this episode, as I will demonstrate, self-centeredness and rivalry move forward and are joined by a new constraint, foreshadowed in the previous episode. This new constraint is Joseph's self forged Egyptian mask under which he hides his true identity. As for the constraint of self-centeredness, it will be finally resolved in this episode, which will also influence Joseph's problem with rivalry. The rivalry itself, though silenced for the time being, will still continue to the next episode. I will show that while Joseph achieved the fullness of autonomy, he underwent a serious regression in discovering his true identity. Breaking with his past and family bonds, he covered everything with a made up Egyptian mask. The main message of this episode is the importance of solitude and detachment, which helps in the process of discernment and making proper decisions about one's own life and identity.

This section I will devote to the episode which in fact consists of two different scenes: chapter 40 and chapter 41. The rationale for putting them together is as follows. First of all, comparing to the settings in the previous episodes, the setting of prison is almost the same. We see Joseph entering the stage, gaining favor in the eyes of the local authority and receiving favors and power over all the household (39:21-23). Thus the prison episode seems to be an adequate match for the previous ones. We cannot divorce it, however, from the next scene in the Pharaoh's household for a few reasons. First of all, the two episodes are connected by the recurrence of two dreams (40:8-19 and 41:1-32), which also bring back a theme from the very first episode

analyzed here (37:5-10). Secondly, some important themes from previous episodes, i.e., the clothing and the response of the local authority, are still missing in the prison setting. Thirdly, at the end of the episode, contrary to the previous ones, Joseph does not leave the stage, he remains in the same place, which makes an impression that the story has not been resolved yet. Finally, contrary to the previous episodes, the episode in prison has no clear ending as it ends up in a suspense. In summary, even though these are two different scenes and chapters, with a two year gap of narrated time in between, there are narrative indications to read them together as a whole episode, understanding chapter 40 as an exposition to chapter 41, which is also suggested by von Rad.¹⁰¹

2. Self-centeredness and Rivalry

This episode begins in prison, underlining Joseph's lack of autonomy. His imprisonment is a consequence of rivalry with Potiphar's wife. The wording of the "pit", בור (40:15 and 41:14), echoes back the violence Joseph suffered from his brothers in the previous episode (37:20.22.24.28.29), which is also noted by Robert Alter.¹⁰² Once more Joseph was defeated by rivalry and ended up as a slave. This time, however, he stays in the "pit" for a longer period of time, i.e., at least two years (41:1). This time of isolation is for Joseph a time of facing the consequences of rivalry and self-centeredness from both previous episodes. Detached from the world and labels, Joseph undergoes three constraints: he faces his twisted self esteem, discovers his true self and makes decisions about his future. I will demonstrate that this is Joseph's final test, before being brought out from the pit by the Pharaoh and becoming autonomous.

¹⁰¹ Rad, *Genesis*, 374.

¹⁰² Alter, *Genesis*, 232.

There are two other characters who ended up in prison and in a similar way as Joseph, by angering their master. From the beginning of the episode Joseph finds himself with them in an ambiguous relationship. On the one hand he is in charge of all the prisoners (39:23), and on the other hand he was appointed to serve (שרת) them (40:4).¹⁰³ This echoes back Joseph's ambiguous position among his brothers as both a watcher and a helper (37:2). Once again we may think of this contradiction as two different versions of the story, but we can also take it as another situation of ambiguity, where Joseph is struggling with his issues of self-centeredness and rivalry. Now, both prisoners have angered their master (40:1) and both of them have dreams (40:5). The anger echoes back Potiphar's (39:19) and brothers' anger against Joseph (37:4.5.8.11), whereas dreams echo back Joseph's own narcissistic dreams of being like a god. Both of these details show, that the prisoners share same story as Joseph and thus are somehow equal to him in terms of fate. It is a significant shift in Joseph's story, full of competing characters, fighting for the first place. Here, instead of masters, slaves or rivals, we see two other "Josephs". Maybe they are his alter egos, or maybe they just serve the story as mirrors to Joseph's character. The ambiguity of relationships and the occurrence of dreams refer back to two main constraints of Joseph's life: rivalry and self-centeredness.

Joseph's inner struggle against self-centeredness and rivalry is also visible in his first words spoken in this episode. The literal translation of Joseph's words to the prisoners, following the order of the words, is: "Is it not God, to whom [belongs] interpreting? Tell them to me" (40:8). The concentric structure of this verse juxtaposes Joseph and God around the interpretation of dreams. Taking this answer literally one may think that Joseph equals himself with God - he is the one who will give the interpretation. This is even more probable, as the context of dreams

¹⁰³ Rad, *Genesis*, 369.

echoes back Joseph's own narcissistic dreams, in which he was seeing himself like a god, receiving divine worship from his own family members. On the other hand, it is the first time in the story that Joseph makes reference to God, admitting that פתֵר (meaning, interpretation, knowledge)¹⁰⁴ comes only from God.¹⁰⁵ The ambiguity of this statement, the details echoing Joseph's past, and the two other prisoners, sharing Joseph's fate, make us think that Joseph faces now his past and his biggest constraints. He has to take this final test, discern well and make a decision about himself and his future. He is going to face his dreams once more and choose one version of himself.

If we look at the dreams keeping in mind the problem of rivalry and self-centeredness, they convey a very significant message. The first dream (40:9-11) presents a prisoner in relation to someone else, i.e., the Pharaoh, who is noted three times in the dream. The central theme of the dream is service, i.e., all the steps of processing the wine and giving back Pharaoh's chalice into his hand (40:13). It is worth noticing, that this slight detail echoes back Joseph leaving the garment in the hand of Potiphar's wife (39:12), which has a meaning of giving up power and leaving it in the hands of someone else. The second dream (40:16-17), on the other hand, presents the prisoner on his own, without interaction with any other person. The prisoner is passive, the bread in the baskets is already made. Interestingly, there are three baskets stuck on his head, like some sort of a crown (40:16). Robert Alter sees this "basket tower" as showing off, presenting "service as circus."¹⁰⁶ The "upper most" basket (40:17), as it is usually translated, is described with the Hebrew word "elyon" (עליון). Elyon is a word used as one of the divine names (El Elyon) and it is the only way it is used in the Book of Genesis. Now, putting these dreams together in the

¹⁰⁴ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 837.

¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, all previous notices about God making Joseph succeed were not Joseph's observations but comments made by the narrator. The only character who recognized that God was blessing Joseph was Potiphar (39:3).

¹⁰⁶ Alter, *Genesis*, 232.

context of rivalry, self-centeredness and Joseph's past, there are a few significant observations to be made. The first dream is focused on service, mentioning the person of Pharaoh (triple mention), presenting a person serving the Pharaoh, and giving up the cup into his hand. The second dream, however, puts the dreamer at the center, with his crown-like construction making him higher, showing off or aspiring to be God. Seeing these two dreams, and reflecting on his past, Joseph is placed before a decision. On the one hand he sees his previous life of rivalry and self-centeredness and, on the other, an opportunity for a different life of focusing on others and serving them. With his life experience and wisdom, he makes a discernment and a choice. He makes discernment by judging which of the prisoners (versions of himself) is doomed to die and which of them has chances to live. He makes a choice by telling the lucky prisoner: remember me before the Pharaoh, so I may be freed from the pit (40:17).

We can observe Joseph's decision in practice in the next scene, when he is faced by the very same constraint: to interpret the dreams of someone else. Being asked by the Pharaoh about interpreting his dreams (41:15), Joseph responds in a similar way as he did to his co-prisoners. This time, however, he leaves no ambiguity in his answer. He says "Not me! God will bring *shalom* to the Pharaoh" (41:16). As in the previous scene we were still not sure whether Joseph perceives himself as God, in this scene we can see clearly that in his journey Joseph has realized that he is not in the center of his life, but God is. This detail shows that Joseph has finally resolved the problem of his self-centeredness. He is aware of his value but also knows its limits.

I have demonstrated that the prison episode presents Joseph's final test and decision about his life. Facing the horrors of his life caused by rivalry and self-centeredness, Joseph recognizes the truth about his past and makes decision about his future. His life experience made him a smart person, able to learn quickly and discern well. Joseph discovers himself as a wise person, gifted

with the skill of interpretation. He gives up rivalry and the urge to take the first place, to make himself God. He gives up ruling for the sake of serving. He leaves the cup in Pharaoh's hand as he left his garment in woman's hand before. Joseph discovered that this serving version of himself can bring him out of the pit and grant him autonomy. This decision has resolved ultimately Joseph's struggle with self-centeredness, granting him a proper balance between knowing his own value and limits to it.

3. Identity

In this section I will demonstrate how Joseph's identity was changing since the last episode and what is its current state. The theme of identity is at the center of the second scene in this episode, during Joseph's encounter with the Pharaoh. There are a few details I will focus on in this episode. Firstly, instead of being labeled by others, Joseph for the first time "labels" himself. Secondly, Joseph faces the authority of the place as an equal with an equal. Finally, Joseph is a very active character in this scene and the whole course of events occurs according to Joseph's own plan and initiative. I will argue that these details are evidence for Joseph's autonomy. I will also demonstrate that Joseph's journey towards authenticity is surprisingly interrupted by his romance with Egyptian culture. Instead of becoming who he really is, Joseph denies his true identity and puts on an Egyptian mask.

A theme which is most important for the understanding Joseph's identity in this episode is linked to Joseph's first action after being brought out of the pit. Immediately after being released from the prison Joseph shaves himself and changes his clothes (41:14). Interestingly, while in his detailed analysis of garments Matthews insinuates clothing where there is none (e.g. prison),¹⁰⁷ he overlooks this significant moment of clothing. This detail, however, is crucial for the story. It

¹⁰⁷ Matthews, "The Anthropology of Clothing in the Joseph Narrative," 32.

is the first and only moment in the whole story, that Joseph himself makes changes to his own outfit. No one else has influence over who Joseph is and how he should look like. No more labels from the others. During his time in prison, as we have seen above, Joseph has made a decision about who he wants to be. Now, after being released from prison, Joseph presents himself as he wants to be and as such he goes to stand before the Pharaoh. There are two aspects of Joseph's self-forged identity: his natural gifts and his national identity. The one based on his natural gifts is introduced as "the one who is wise and discerning". It can be inferred from the mere way in which Joseph's speaks and acts, but also from an innocent detail which Joseph himself entwines within his daring and carefully planned speech addressed to the Pharaoh. Pretending to speak objectively Joseph mentions some "hypothetical person" who would be "wise and discerning" (41:33). While saying this, he provides all the obvious indications to present himself as such. Thus this is his new face, a part of his identity, which he has discovered and developed for himself. The Pharaoh picks this indirect suggestion very quickly and recognizes Joseph as "wise and discerning" (41:39). The second aspect of Joseph's new identity is his national affiliation, which surprisingly turns out to be Egyptian. Robert Alter points out that Joseph's shaving before meeting with the Pharaoh (41:14) is a custom typical for Egyptians.¹⁰⁸ By shaving himself Joseph makes a deliberate decision to present himself before the Pharaoh as one of his own, as an Egyptian. This decision to put on an Egyptian mask turns out to be radical in consequences, as we trace the course of events. Once more Joseph is labeled, as he becomes clothed by Egyptians with no less than three items: a fine garment, a golden chain on his neck and a signet ring on his finger (41:42). Moreover, apart from mere clothing, this time he is even given an Egyptian name Zaphenath-Paneah (41:45), which did not happen before. He also marries an Egyptian woman, which signalizes a break with the tradition of the Patriarchs, as it was shown before in the case of

¹⁰⁸ Alter, *Genesis*, 236.

Judah.¹⁰⁹ All of these details grouped together show that Joseph's final label, the Egyptian mask, is much more developed than any other before. Finally, Joseph becomes a father of two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim (41:51-52). The names of the sons indicate Joseph's radical and complete detachment from his past. On the one hand he is happy to forget the father's house (Manasseh), on the other he recognizes the blessings he has received in Egypt (Ephraim). As Alter points out, נִשְׁכַּח, "to forget", is a strictly legal term which should be translated as "being relieved from the condition of debt".¹¹⁰ A similar observation has been made by Von Rad, who underlines that forgetting here is not "subjective and psychological", but rather "objective and external" - home and father are objectively lost.¹¹¹ If this is the case, then Joseph's detachment from his family and past is even more radical. In his psychological analysis of the Joseph's story, Samuel Mann demonstrates a mechanism of psychological numbing, i.e., a subconscious mechanism which helps one deal with one's traumatic past experiences.¹¹² While it does not provide the exact interpretation of נִשְׁכַּח in this passage, it is clear that Joseph's decisions in this chapter are in accord with this psychological mechanism. The denial of the past and covering himself with fake identity helps Joseph deal with his problems. It does not solve them, however. As Mann points out, psychological numbing block a person from achieving healing and psychological wholeness, which will eventually happen in the next episode. In summary, in this chapter Joseph has forged his new identity, basing on the natural gifts he has discovered and making a deliberate decision to break with the past and put on an Egyptian mask.

¹⁰⁹ In previous narratives Ishmael and Esau, the "rejected" sons, were the ones who were marrying Egyptian women. It was seen as something inappropriate and they had no place among the descendants of Abraham.

¹¹⁰ Alter, *Genesis*, 242.

¹¹¹ Rad, *Genesis*, 379.

¹¹² Mann, "Joseph and His Brothers: A Biblical Paradigm for the Optimal Handling of Traumatic Stress," 340.

4. Autonomy

In this section I will show that Joseph has finally reached the state of autonomy in his journey. He is a free agent, equal to others and not dependent on anyone, being able to decide and act on his own. It is visible in Joseph's encounter with Pharaoh, the authority of the place. It is the first time in Joseph's story that we see him interacting with the authority (except for Jacob). There were three other figures of authority in Joseph's previous life. The first of them was Jacob, who labeled Joseph and was the cause of his future problems. Everything in the household was working according to Jacob's initiative, and Joseph was an "obedient pet" without his own mind or will. The second and third figures of authority were Potiphar and the chief of prison, with whom Joseph had no interaction at all.

Now in this episode we see Joseph interacting with the authority as an equal with an equal (Gen 41). The equality of the characters is visible in their initial dialogue. The Pharaoh describes his dream in eight verses (41:17-24) and then Joseph gives the interpretation of the dream in eight verses as well (41:25-32). Such distribution of verses, as Alter points out, is a known "technique of contrastive dialogue repeatedly used by the biblical writers to define the differences between characters in verbal confrontation."¹¹³ Thus the same length of speech shows equality of engagement and status of the two parties. This, however, is not the end of Joseph's activity. After this balanced initial exchange, Joseph takes the initiative and continues his speech exceeding Pharaoh's request (41:34-36). He speaks longer than the Pharaoh, tells him more than he was asked for and, moreover, tells Pharaoh himself what he should do. Now, when we look carefully, we can see that Joseph's interpretation of the Pharaoh's dream mentions God four times, always and exclusively together with the mention about the Pharaoh (41:25.28.32). The purpose of such

¹¹³ Alter, *Genesis*, 225.

juxtaposition in Joseph's speech may be his belief that ultimately God is above everything. It may be also his intention to flatter the Pharaoh. The second interpretation is more likely, when we consider Joseph as a "wise and discerning" person and observe what happens after Joseph ends the interpretation of the dreams. Without pardon or hesitating, he exceeds Pharaoh's request and, without being asked, tells the Pharaoh what to do in response to these dreams. He instructs Pharaoh for the good four verses what to do, step by step. Surprisingly, Joseph's daring action pleases Pharaoh's and achieves planned effect (41:37). Not only does the Pharaoh recognize Joseph as wise and discerning, but also mimics Joseph's speech juxtaposing Joseph with God (41:38-39). As Alter points out, the Pharaoh quickly uses Joseph's own language and ideas.¹¹⁴ Joseph achieved everything as planned. All of these show Joseph's significant growth in activity and initiative. Not only does he match Pharaoh in conversation, but he is bold enough to instruct him and even manipulate him in order to achieve his own goals. Still one has to remember, that at the end of the day Joseph still remains "the second" in the Pharaoh's household, as the Pharaoh does not share his throne with him (41:40), which echoes back the limit set by Potiphar. Thus the equality on the personal level does not entail equality on the level of authority. Joseph achieved his greatness without the need of claiming the position of the highest authority. This significant change in Joseph's activity provides evidence for his growth in autonomy.

4. Solution

Finally, let us see what solution does this episode present for further growth in autonomy and authenticity. The main step presented in this episode is the process of discernment, which is characterized by: isolation, time, introspection and decision. Isolation is a particular context of the process of discernment, which has also been seen in a previous episode. The household of

¹¹⁴ Alter, 239.

Potiphar became for Joseph a neutral ground for learning healthy limits. This time the context is even more neutral. Joseph is not challenged by any other characters. Being separated from the world of power, he encounters two other prisoners who are equal to him in many ways. The isolation and equality of fate provide for Joseph a perfect neutral ground for an undisturbed discernment. The time of discernment is also significant. It is the only moment in the story that we hear how long did Joseph stay in one place. Thus one has to spend a long time in a neutral ground to be able to perform a successful discernment. The biggest fruit of my analysis above is Joseph's process of introspection and reflection on his own life. Faced once more by two dreams and the temptation of rivalry and self-centeredness Joseph discerns (interprets) not only the fate of his inmates, but also his past struggles and two "versions" of himself. He makes an assessment of his own dreams and constrains as well as their consequences. The process of discernment ends with a conscious decision about the direction of Joseph's own future life. The process of discernment moved Joseph towards a conscious decision to turn away from self-centeredness and focus on people around him. At the same time, it helped him to discover some truth about himself, as a "wise and discerning" person. It is thus a significant step towards both autonomy and authenticity.

Although necessary and fruitful, the process of discernment did not fully bring Joseph towards truth. He also discovered that in order to grow in autonomy in the Egyptian context he has to deny his true Hebrew identity and put on an Egyptian mask. Thus to grow in autonomy he had to pay the price of authenticity. I think that the Egyptian mask, even though it had to be removed later on, helped Joseph in his journey. It is because of this mask that he managed to stand in front of the Pharaoh as an authority of the place, take the initiative and act boldly. It was

a temporary yet efficient instrument, that helped Joseph grow in self confidence and go back into the world as an autonomous person.

In summary, the third step on one's journey towards authenticity and autonomy, as the episode demonstrates, is the process of discernment. One has to spend a longer period of time in solitude, examining one's own desires, behaviors and memories, in order to make a decision about one's future. It is a time of assessment and recognition of one's own strength and talents, which helps in discovering one's identity and developing a new way of being and acting. This process helps a person in acting according to his or her own initiative and decisions, rather than being dependent on others.

6. Summary

In this chapter I have demonstrated Joseph's transformation in the household of the Pharaoh. I have shown that he made a big progress in facing the constraints of self-centeredness and rivalry. A long time in isolation and reflection about his past and desires brought him to the point of making a conscious decision about his future life. He decided to give up rivalry and self-centeredness for the sake of recognizing others in his life and serving them. At the same time he discovered his identity as a "wise and discerning" person and initiated a radical change in his life, which brought him out of prison and put him next to the Pharaoh himself. This episode shows Joseph finally becoming an autonomous person. He talks with the authority as an equal with an equal and makes autonomous decisions about his life. At the same time, he forfeits his true identity, hiding behind an Egyptian mask, which serves as a tool in gaining autonomy. The practical guideline presented in this episode is the necessity of discernment, i.e., a longer time in

isolation, during which one examines one's life and inner self in order to make a decision about one's future.

Chapter IV: Joseph's Household

1. Setting the stage

This last episode, as I will demonstrate, marks an end in Joseph's journey towards autonomy and authenticity. The meeting with his brothers awakens in Joseph the constraint of rivalry, which motivates his actions for the majority of the episode. Judah's speech, however, brings his vicious rivalry to the point in which no matter what he does, he will hurt those he loves. It is this paradoxical situation that disarms Joseph's will for rivalry completely. At the same time, faced by his past, Joseph undergoes an inner struggle between who he really is and what he imagines for himself. The intensity of meetings with his brothers pierce through Joseph's carefully designed Egyptian mask and cause his true self to emerge. I will demonstrate that Joseph ultimately comes to peace with his past and family, accepting all his life and admitting to his true self. This last episode consists of two major scenes: the meeting of the brothers (Gen 42:6-25) and the household of Joseph (43:16-45:24). Even though Pharaoh is still first in the kingdom overall, from the narrative point of view it is Joseph who plays the role of authority in this particular scene. Moreover, it is the first time that we see a direct mention of "Joseph's household" (43:16ff). Thus the episode fits the same logic presented before, i.e., its setting is based on a household with an authority ruling over it.

2. Rivalry

This last episode presents Joseph in a surprising way. On the one hand it seems that the rivalry problem is over. Joseph takes the position of the authority of the place in this episode and he is not endangered by anyone. On the other hand, the appearance of his brothers evoke in Joseph the state of rivalry from the first episode. The problem of rivalry was dormant in his past

wounds and hurting memories, and now awakens with all its previous force. Once more, as in the initial episode, he abuses his power and position in order to take revenge on his previous oppressors. From the state of being an oppressed victim, Joseph becomes oppressor himself. Only the speech of Judah manages to bring to light the absurdity of Joseph's rivalry, by which he would inevitably hurt those he loves. Judah himself recognized it in chapter 38 and now brings Joseph to the same recognition. Thus, in this episode the problem of rivalry from Joseph's part becomes resolved once and for all.¹¹⁵

Not all scholars agree that that this episode is a continuation of the family rivalry. There is an old and ongoing debate¹¹⁶ whether Joseph in this episode is presented as a figure of wisdom, guiding his brothers towards repentance¹¹⁷, or a vengeful victim, unleashing his anger against his previous oppressors¹¹⁸. There is no doubt that the events in chapters 42-45 are deeply emotional for all Jacob's sons. The question remains, however, what is the motivation of their actions, especially the motivations of Joseph's obscure and complex strategy of playing with his brothers' emotions. The first scene which I am going to analyze (42:6-25) sets the stage for the subsequent longer scene in Joseph's household (43:16-45:24). It is here that we should look for the motivations of Joseph's mysterious behavior.

In the beginning of the first scene we are introduced into the encounter between Joseph and his brothers by a series of three *waw*-consecutive verbs: Joseph *recognizes* his brothers, *acts as a stranger* and *speaks harshly* to them (42:7). The traditional reading supported by some

¹¹⁵ By this point both Judah and Joseph are transformed and no longer take part in rivalry. It is obvious that the rest of the brothers still have a problem with rivalry, which comes out again in the last chapter, with their fear for Joseph's revenge. They too have to realize God's plan trampling every human action.

¹¹⁶ Hilgert, "The Dual Image of Joseph in Hebrew and Early Jewish Literature."

¹¹⁷ This was the main interpretation for centuries, still supported by some scholars like von Rad.

¹¹⁸ A more recent interpretation gaining more popularity, supported by the increasing number of scholars, such as Sternberg, Alter and Clifford.

scholars translates one of the consecutive *waw*'s as a disjunctive "but" instead of a conjunctive "and", influencing the meaning of the whole verse. Thus they translate the verse as follows: "Joseph recognized them *but* acted as a stranger and spoke harshly to them". Such translation insinuates that the subsequent two verbs are in some way in opposition to the first, rather than a continuation or a consequence. There is no grammatical reason to pick and choose one *waw* to serve a disjunctive role rather than conjunctive. It seems that the choice of "but" is motivated by the presupposed image of Joseph as a wise man, as if Joseph was happy to see his brothers *but* was hiding behind a harsh mask in order to teach them a lesson. I don't think this interpretation is convincing. A series of *waw* consecutive verbs is usually translated as a chain of subsequent actions. In this case, moreover, putting together many verbs close to one another serves to underline the rapid character and pace of Joseph's reaction to the recognition of his brothers. The particular word used in this verse for "acting as a stranger" as Wénin and Sternberg point out, is derived from the key word in the whole story, i.e., the word נכר, "to recognize", and echoes back brothers' plotting against Joseph in chapter 37.¹¹⁹ If we compare the recognition scenes of Joseph and Judah, we can see a radical difference between them. As many recent authors point out, these two scenes are linked by the word נכר and should be read alongside. Judah's recognition is a moment of heartbreaking admitting to his own mistakes, recognizing the superiority of God's plan and the righteousness of Tamar. Joseph's recognition is nothing of that sort. Instead of that, he becomes angry and acts violently. Joseph's נכר in this scene is the reversal of recognition, i.e., becoming a stranger. He comes to the point of true recognition later in the episode, with the help of Judah, his brother. This additional detail strengthens the hypothesis, that Joseph's pain and anger begin to dominate the scene. Thus, from the grammatical point of view, the structure of the

¹¹⁹ Wénin, *Giuseppe o l'invenzione della fratellanza*, 99.

verse suggests that the recognition of his brothers evoked in Joseph a strong emotional reaction of anger.

Now, as narrator recounts, the first thing that came to Joseph's mind after seeing his brothers are his previous dreams (42:9). On the one hand it is a proof that his dreams were prophetic in nature. On the other hand, however, it is a reference to self-centeredness and rivalry from Joseph's youth. As we remember the dreams were a reason for which the brothers hated Joseph and sold him into slavery (37:5.10.19). Thus the presence of the dreams brings back the relationship of rivalry, a struggle of power which ends up in slavery. It demonstrates also Joseph's victorious position who won the "competition" and is now looking down on his brothers with satisfaction. As Robert Alter puts it, it is a "sweet triumph" of Joseph.¹²⁰ The first words of Joseph in this episode, juxtaposed with dreams, are the words of accusation and oppression.¹²¹ The repetition of this accusation in the story (42:9.12.14), as Alter argues, is an expression of some psychological resonance, confirming Joseph's reaction of anger.¹²² It is surprising that after all his journey and maturation, Joseph turns back to his initial relationship with brothers, where he was abusing his position and power in order to harm them.

There are many narrative details which prove that in this episode Joseph seeks revenge for being sold to Egypt. Everything he does and says refers to that event of his life. He turns everything upside down, though, placing his brothers in the position of the victim and hurts them in the same way he was hurt. First of all, he accuses them three times of spying (42:9.12.14), which is exactly the thing he himself used to do in Jacob's household (37:2). It is possible that there was a very similar dialogue between Joseph and his brothers in the scene of Joseph's

¹²⁰ Alter, *Genesis*, 246.

¹²¹ Matthews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 776.

¹²² Alter, *Genesis*, 246.

"execution", when they were accusing him of spying and he was pleading for life. It is recognized as such by the brothers themselves, as the whole conversation with Joseph evokes in them a memory putting Joseph into the pit (Gen 42:21). Joseph, in disguise, may be quoting his brother's previous accusations, to unleash his pain and anger by acting out the whole event other way round. As Matthews points out, Joseph "rejects the reasoning of their pleas of innocence just as they had once rejected his plea from the pit".¹²³ In addition to accusations, Joseph treats them as he himself was treated. He puts them in the prison for three days (42:17) which recalls his stay in the pit for the same three days.¹²⁴ Moreover, he orders their brother Simeon to be bound before their eyes (42:24), which evokes in them the memory of having Joseph imprisoned before their eyes (37:23-24). The reason for this anger, as Alter¹²⁵ and Matthews¹²⁶ point out, may be the fact that Joseph does not see Benjamin among his brothers. Remembering his own story, he is afraid that the same fate happened to his beloved brother.

In his article, Samuel Mann interprets Joseph's behavior on the basis of modern psychological trauma theories. On the one hand I am not in favor of imposing modern psychological theories on the biblical text, whose authors had no idea about modern science. On the other hand however, to some degree both psychology and biblical literature deal with the same object, i.e., human beings in relation to other human beings. Even though psychological arguments should not be used to argue for a particular reading of the biblical story, they can be used to show a point from a different angle. Mann points out three problematic details about Joseph's behavior: he never contacted his family house even though he could, he was tormenting his brothers for a long period of time, and, finally, he was intentionally hurting Jacob by stealing

¹²³ Matthews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 777.

¹²⁴ Mann, "Joseph and His Brothers: A Biblical Paradigm for the Optimal Handling of Traumatic Stress," 338.

¹²⁵ Alter, *Genesis*, 247.

¹²⁶ Matthews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 776.

Benjamin away to Egypt.¹²⁷ While the last question about tormenting Jacob is hard to defend and has no literary evidence, the previous two are still worth asking. Mann answers these problems saying that separation and anger are a necessary step in the process of healing after trauma. "Conscious acknowledging and experiencing of previously inaccessible anger and deep pain may be necessary before love is reawakened."¹²⁸ He also points out that in the scene of their first encounter, Joseph's anger and desire of revenge is so strong that he doesn't even pay attention to his brothers' answers and doesn't hear that his own father is still alive.¹²⁹

Joseph's problem with rivalry comes back again in the second scene, when he brings brothers into his own household. All previous episodes were based on the same logic, setting a household with one authority and everyone else subject to that authority. Joseph orders to bring his brothers into his household (43:16), he brings them into the relationship of "master-slave" character, which was present in previous episodes as well. Brothers themselves recognize it and are afraid that by going into the household they will become slaves and lose everything (43:18). As Heffelfinger points out in her article, the food leitmotif in this story is always connected to the power struggle. As she demonstrates the meal in Joseph's household is a flashback of the scene from the first episode, where the brothers were having a meal over the pit, while Joseph was imprisoned. Also this time Joseph is detached from them and eating at the separate table (43:32). This time, however, it is them who are in a threat of being sold into slavery.¹³⁰ The scene is filled with signs of rivalry, such as exaggerated preference for Benjamin (43:34). Additionally, Joseph demonstrates constantly his superiority of knowledge over his brothers. He knows everything about them, while they know nothing about him. He shows it by sitting them in the order of

¹²⁷ Mann, "Joseph and His Brothers: A Biblical Paradigm for the Optimal Handling of Traumatic Stress," 337.

¹²⁸ Mann, 340.

¹²⁹ Mann, 338.

¹³⁰ Heffelfinger, "From Bane to Blessing," 310.

seniority (43:33), and plays with them using his "divination goblet" which is also a sign of secret knowledge (44:2-5).¹³¹ The problem of rivalry is grave in this episode, and reaches its climax and resolution with the speech of Judah, which will be discussed shortly.

3. Identity

In this section I will demonstrate how Joseph's true identity emerged during the encounter with his brothers. I have shown earlier that Joseph's "Egyptian mask" is a byproduct of his process of detachment and separation, which ultimately led him to the state of forgetting his father, family and his past. The coming of his brothers eliminated the distance, brought back memories and awakened old feelings. The crucial role in this process was played by the two most beloved persons in Joseph's life, i.e., his father Jacob and his younger brother Benjamin. As I will show, facing his past and, especially, a memory of Jacob makes Joseph lose control over his feelings and face his true self.

The inner struggle for Joseph's identity is marvelously depicted in this episode. It begins in the first scene, when his brothers feel guilty for having sold Joseph (42:21). It is the moment when Joseph has to hide himself crying (42:23-24). It is the first of the three moments in which Joseph's mask cracks in order to finally break and reveal his true identity. It is, as Alter points out, a masterfully designed "crescendo pattern" in the story.¹³² In the words of Mann, "Joseph is edging towards catharsis of repressed anguish, but the text is telling us that a little sobbing does not constitute true catharsis. His actions remain dominated by anger."¹³³ It is only in the scene where Joseph inquires about his father and younger brother that his mask is finally broken. A powerful and harsh governor is deeply moved with affection and cannot control his tears. As

¹³¹ Alter, *Genesis*, 258–60.

¹³² Alter, 248.

¹³³ Mann, "Joseph and His Brothers: A Biblical Paradigm for the Optimal Handling of Traumatic Stress," 338.

Mann suggests, it may be the case that Joseph's unconscious defenses, repressing his past and true self, cannot hold anymore, and Joseph's emotions begin to dominate the whole course of events.¹³⁴ An inner struggle was triggered within him, a fight between his two identities. On the one hand we see his Egyptian mask and determination to remain separate from his family and household. With cold blood he conducts his plan of claiming Benjamin for himself and sending his brothers away. On the other hand, the memories and feelings he had for his father are coming back and explode with a wave of overwhelming emotions. Joseph enters into this conflict trying to maintain his Egyptian mask. It is wonderfully depicted by the action of washing his face, i.e., hiding any sign of tears¹³⁵ and emotions, washing away his affections and cover it with a makeup (43:30). In his article Yoo analyzes Egyptian literature and points out that this unique biblical motif of washing one's face is, in fact, an Egyptian custom, foreign for Israelites, with a possible cultic meaning.¹³⁶ He argues further on that it should not be given any cultic significance, as biblical authors would rather present Joseph as a devout Israelite.¹³⁷ I don't think we should deny such possibility. The main message of this detail, as Yoo himself underlines, is Joseph's struggle to maintain his Egyptian identity and detach himself from his brothers. The washing of his face is linked to the verb קפא, which designates a forceful action of restraining or controlling oneself.¹³⁸ It is another "piece of garment" which Joseph is covered with and which he does not want to lose. It is the same garment he put on while shaving himself before the meeting with the Pharaoh, his self forged identity which granted him success and helped him break with his past. But beneath this mask his true identity is coming back to light, the identity of a son and of a brother. He still represses his true identity, though, by controlling himself, and restraining his emotions.

¹³⁴ Mann, 337.

¹³⁵ Alter, *Genesis*, 257.

¹³⁶ Yoo, "Why Does Joseph Wash His Face?," 8–12.

¹³⁷ Yoo, 13–14.

¹³⁸ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 67.

Now, throughout the whole episode Joseph is occupied with two persons only: his old father and his younger brother. It is visible in many ways throughout the narrative. Thus we can see, for example, a parallel structure of Joseph's inquiry, which is built around these two (43:26-30):

A Brothers bow before Joseph

B Joseph asks: Is **your old father** alive?

C Brothers respond: Yes, he is alive.

A' Brothers bow before Joseph

B' Joseph asks: is this **your young brother**?

C' Joseph is overcome with affection.

The particular love for Benjamin is visible in many ways.¹³⁹ He forced his brothers to bring Benjamin to Egypt (42:16-20), he gave him a bigger portion of food (43:34), he designs an intrigue to separate Benjamin from his brothers and make him stay with him (44:1-5.10.17) and at the end of the day gives him more garments and money (45:22). Explaining this Joseph's behavior Richard Clifford claims that¹⁴⁰ Joseph's priority in this episode is to free Benjamin from the twisted household he himself was suffering from. Joseph believes that his younger brother is suffering the very same situation as he did in his own youth and wants to save him. As we remember, Joseph himself broke all bonds with his household and now he wants to bring Benjamin down to Egypt, as once he was brought there by the Midianites. Now, Joseph's concern with Jacob is not entirely clear. On the one hand it seems that he cares for him, by asking about his health. Despite that he seems to not hear the answer of the brothers and has to ask that question again later on. Mann argues here that while Joseph's love for Benjamin is clearly

¹³⁹ Matthews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 790–91.

¹⁴⁰ Clifford, "Genesis 37-50: Joseph Story of Jacob Story?," 223.

"surfacing", he is "still remarkably unaware of any longing to see his father."¹⁴¹ It may be a consequence of what I have pointed out before, namely, Joseph's decision to forget the father's house, i.e., to detach himself from his past relationships. In Mann's words this ambiguity "can be explained by recognizing the numbing of Joseph's love for his father, numbing which was perhaps necessary for his psychological stability after his abduction from his family."¹⁴² On the other hand, however, as Clifford points out, Joseph shows signs of love and care for Jacob. The reason for which he changes his mind and decides to send nine brothers instead of one is, as Clifford argues, because he recognizes that they will be able to carry more grain home, and so they can help Benjamin and Jacob survive famine.¹⁴³ The same point is argued by Matthews.¹⁴⁴ If Joseph wanted to free Benjamin only, he would force his brothers to bring him back as soon as possible. Instead, he sends with brothers with a substantial amount of food, to survive a longer period of time. I think that this ambiguity in Joseph's relationship to Jacob is crucial for the proper understanding of the impact that the speech of Judah had on Joseph, which we will see shortly. Joseph's love for Benjamin is clear, whereas his love for Jacob is somehow dormant. It is the speech of Judah that will bring it back to life.

4. Transformation

The climactic moment in chapter 45, when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, is agreed to be a final moment of Joseph's transformation. This transformation is commonly interpreted to be moral and religious. Joseph recognizes the superiority of God within the human history. Seeing how his own plans are trampled by God's plan, Joseph gives up his wickedness and anger, and becomes a righteous man of God. Although I agree with this moral and religious

¹⁴¹ Mann, "Joseph and His Brothers: A Biblical Paradigm for the Optimal Handling of Traumatic Stress," 339.

¹⁴² Mann, 339.

¹⁴³ Clifford, "Genesis 37-50: Joseph Story of Jacob Story?," 223.

¹⁴⁴ Matthews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 779–80.

transformation of Joseph, as well as with divine hand guiding it to completion, my analysis has been and will be more subtle. My anthropological approach states a question about Joseph's transformation in a different way than the approaches mentioned above. Instead of asking "if", "why", "what kind of" and "in relation to whom" the transformation occurred, I am asking "how" and "in what way" Joseph as a human being was transformed. Thus I am looking at Joseph not as a Patriarch of the twelve tribes of Israel, neither as a leader and savior of the whole world. I view him as a human being, entangled into the realm of human relationships and inner struggles. In this section I am going to summarize the problem of rivalry and identity, and demonstrate how the speech of Judah helped Joseph free himself from these constraints.

Joseph's careful and elaborate plan was designed to detach Benjamin, his beloved brother, from the rest of the family and bring him into his own household. When he made his intention clear and his decision irrevocable, Judah stepped in and begun his masterfully crafted speech, which leads to Joseph's transformation (44:16-34). Judah speech is focused in a special way on Jacob, Joseph's father.¹⁴⁵ He mentions Jacob for the total of fourteen times and stresses his threat of death and suffering five times. He begins by mentioning Benjamin and Jacob, according to Joseph's explicit interest, and ends by mentioning Jacob's, and more precisely his death and suffering. It seems that the whole speech is designed in such a way to remind Joseph of his own father and to reawake in him feelings towards him.¹⁴⁶ As Matthews points out, "this is the first time that Joseph hears how his father learned of his death and his reaction to the news".¹⁴⁷ Such reading is strengthened even more when we consider Joseph's first emotional words while revealing himself to his brothers. The first two things he says are: "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" (45:3). It is the second time Joseph asks this question, as if the first time he did not really

¹⁴⁵ Matthews, 793.

¹⁴⁶ Wenham et al., *Genesis 16-50*, 425.

¹⁴⁷ Matthews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 805.

hear the answer (43:27). This time, however, instead of asking about "your father" he asks about "my father". The speech of Judah, therefore, awakened in Joseph a dormant love for his father. At the same time, the climactic point of the speech is bringing Joseph's plan to a situation of dead end. No matter what he chooses, those he loves will suffer. If he holds beloved Benjamin - his father will suffer and die. If he lets him go, he will lose both Benjamin and Jacob, in exchange for the very brother who wanted to sell him into slavery. This paradox, as Alter and many other scholars point out, brought Joseph to the situation of helplessness and recognition of the divine plan which tramples his own clever plan. Additionally, in the context of rivalry Joseph discovers that vengeance and competing at the end of the day lead to hurting those he loves. The inevitability of this situation disarms him and cuts the constraints of rivalry and anger.

Similarly with Joseph's "Egyptian mask" covering Joseph's true identity. Facing his past memories and emotions, as it was shown before, makes Joseph lose control over his feelings. The speech of Judah had a decisive role in this process. Telling again the whole story of the family, bringing back details about hurting past as well as Jacob's suffering becomes for Joseph too much to control. As Mann puts it, "with the surge of emotion that can no longer be kept from awareness, the floodgates to the pain that has been kept from conscious awareness all those years, are now opened. And, concurrent with awareness of that pain, love and forgiveness surfaces as well."¹⁴⁸ It is interesting to see that the scene of Joseph's self-revelation begins by sending everyone away (45:1). This setting of "no one in the house" recalls the situation with Potiphar's wife, which foreshadows and explains Joseph's revelation (39:11). In Potiphar's wife Joseph left his garment and run away naked, he stripped himself of his power, status and position and became vulnerable in order to maintain his autonomy (39:12). As I have mentioned before,

¹⁴⁸ Mann, "Joseph and His Brothers: A Biblical Paradigm for the Optimal Handling of Traumatic Stress," 339.

quoting Levinson, that scene foreshadowed Joseph's romance with Egyptian culture and his eventual liberation from it. Here, similarly, Joseph strips himself from power, by removing all his subordinates from the house (45:1). He removes disguise and admits plainly: "I am Joseph" (45:3). It is the most striking and simple way of discovering one's own identity. Samuel Mann interprets the loud crying of Joseph as a moment of catharsis (purification, purge) which *per se* is a moment of significant personal change.¹⁴⁹ As he argues, all of Joseph's repressed past and emotions come to surface and are expressed freely at that moment. Thus, together with the surfacing of his own identity, Joseph recognizes and accepts his relationships: I am a son (45:3), I am a brother (45:4); and his painful past: you have sold me to Egypt (45:4). In other words, he admits and accepts everything that constitutes him as a person. Matthews states that it is "facing his painful past that leads the way to his deliverance from the past".¹⁵⁰ As Grossman demonstrates, basing on the 'therapeutic narrative' theory, the subsequent recapitulation of life story by Joseph is a sign of finding a new meaning to it.¹⁵¹ This new interpretation of past events and recognizing divine interventions lead Joseph to welcome and accept his past, not as a traumatic experience to forget, but as a constitutive element of his own identity.

5. Solution

This last episode demonstrates a last step in Joseph's growth towards autonomy and authenticity. It teaches us the final stage of the process and gives a last important guideline for our own growth. This final step is embracing and accepting one's own past as well as recognizing that rivalry ultimately ends up with hurting those one loves. Even though Joseph has detached himself from the present constraints in episode two and made decision about his future in episode

¹⁴⁹ Mann, 339.

¹⁵⁰ Matthews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 777.

¹⁵¹ Grossman, "The Story of Joseph's Brothers in Light of the 'therapeutic Narrative' Theory," 190–92.

three, he is still haunted by his past, which comes onto the stage in episode four. By the actions of detachment and discernment Joseph distanced himself radically from his memories, relationships and past sufferings. This distance appears in the episode as another constraint. A burning anger which turns a successful person into a vengeful monster. To complete his journey towards freedom and truth Joseph is forced to face his past and integrate it into his life. Thus the episode demonstrates explicitly the necessity of integration of one's past in order to become an autonomous and authentic person.

The process of embracing one's own past which is presented in the story has six aspects: time, encounter, reliving of one's emotions, inner struggle, embracing pain and the recognition of the bigger picture. First of all we know that the process took some longer time, as the brothers visited Joseph twice with a longer interval in between. Joseph's first reaction was sharp and rejecting. He needed a few more encounters with his brothers in order to finally embrace his past. Thus it is not an immediate thing one does, but rather a longer process which needs one to face his or her past multiple times. Secondly, it was possible only by a real encounter with his brothers. Seeing their faces and hearing their voices brought back all the memories and emotions long forgotten. It shows that we are relational beings and our past is build upon our relationships with people and places. It is by this physical encounter that Joseph was enabled to access his past in its fullness. Thirdly, the encounter triggers in Joseph all the emotions and feelings which he wanted to forget. There is no question that the narrative artistry of chapter 43 on many levels brings back the situation of selling Joseph into Egypt in chapter 37. It is the same event which is relived by Joseph himself and subsequently acted out against his brothers, so they too can relive it with him. While the archetypical scene is deprived of emotions and any reaction from Joseph's part, his later encounters with brothers belong to the most emotional scenes in the whole Old

Testament. Joseph is overcome with anger, tears, pain and sadness. All these emotions are caused by past events and were never expressed by Joseph in the narrative. It seems that he finally had to face them and relive them in order to embrace his past. Now, the fifth aspect of the process is Joseph's struggle with those emotions. With their emergence he tries to wash them away from his face, keep them at a distance and control them. The pain and suffering is necessary and difficult aspect of embracing one's past. One is ready to interrupt it and run away, in order to avoid those feelings. Also Joseph would certainly run away from embracing his past were it not for the intervention of Judah, which at the end of the day, was another intervention of the third party. It was God himself who intervened in this last moment and was intervening throughout Joseph's whole journey towards autonomy and authenticity. Both Judah and Joseph recognized, that their plans were trampled by a bigger plan written and carried out by God.¹⁵² This final recognition of God's activity and the act of surrender to that activity lead Joseph to freedom and truth with the words: "I am Joseph". He gave up the struggle against his emotions, gave in to God's plan, put his life into God's hand with full trust. Joseph's final confession of his true identity comes together with embracing and accepting his painful past. He admits to be: the one whom you have sold into slavery, your brother, the son of Jacob.

In summary, this final episode demonstrates that the final step towards one's authenticity and autonomy is embracing one's own past with the help of God. It is a painful and difficult process, which requires time and patience. It requires a person to face his or her past together with past relationships and let him or her experience again all the difficult emotions. This risky process of inner struggle ends up well only because of God's saving intervention.

¹⁵² Clifford, "Genesis 37-50: Joseph Story of Jacob Story?," 224.

5. Summary

This last chapter marks the end of Joseph's journey towards autonomy and authenticity. With the final act of embracing his painful past and relationships Joseph undergoes a process of inner integration. In other words, he allows his emotions and memories to enter his consciousness and admits to be who he really is. He takes off the Egyptian mask and becomes authentic. This last step, as I have argued, is once more initiated by the third party and pushes Joseph towards embracing his past. Thus the final guideline presented by the story of Joseph is the necessity of accepting and embracing one's past as well as integrating it into one's identity. Only then one can become an autonomous and authentic person.

Conclusions

1. Summary

The generations of Jacob, similarly to other generation stories within the Book of Genesis, present a process of transformation which people chosen by God undergo throughout their lives. Among many characters presented in the story, with Jacob, Judah and Joseph at the center, I have chosen Joseph and his personal journey of transformation. The most common reading of the story ascribes all the transformations of the characters to God himself, whose divine plan tramples human earthly wicked plans. My practical and pastoral approach confirmed a significant role of the divine plan within the process of transformation, but also allowed me to identify a few other steps which were undertaken by Joseph himself as well as other characters around him, and thus contributed to the human aspect of the process of transformation. In this section I will bring together all the main threads which I was analyzing throughout the paper episode by episode. These threads are: possessive relationships, rivalry, self-centeredness and identity. I will present and discuss each of them separately, showing their development in Joseph's life and demonstrating their dynamics in our modern world. As I have been demonstrating throughout the paper, and will summarize now, the main steps for achieving authenticity and autonomy in our lives are detachment, discernment and embracing of one's past. The main point of this conclusion is to derive some practical solutions for each of the problems, which can be applied in a life of a modern believer.

2. Possessive Relationships

2.1. In Joseph's Story

I have demonstrated that Joseph was a victim of two possessive relationships, from his father Jacob and from Potiphar's wife. Both Jacob and Potiphar's wife were objectifying Joseph, i.e., stripping him from his autonomy as a person and use him for their own purposes. Both of them turned Joseph into a substitute for somebody else, in order to fill the void after the missing person, i.e., respectively, Rachel and Potiphar. Because Joseph managed to free himself from the possessive relationship with the Potiphar's wife, the main characteristics of such relationships are mostly presented in his relationship with Jacob. The possessive relationships were constraining Joseph from growing in authenticity, as they were forcing him to fit in a particular role, to become someone else. The overprotective care as well as exaggerated favoritism prevented Joseph from discovering his true identity. He believed in the illusion of being special and first of all. Additionally, the possessive relationship prevented Joseph from growing in autonomy. Being sheltered all his life and building his identity upon favorable relationship with his father Joseph became totally dependent on that relationship. It was visible by his excessive passivity on the one hand, and full obedience on the other. He was not able to form mature relationships, as all of them were formed on the basis of the twisted relationship of being a favored daddy's son.

The solution to this problem, as presented in the story, was radical detachment. The first instance of such detachment was caused by a neutral third party, stealing Joseph away from the father into a foreign land. As I have presented, it is God himself who is acting within the world and entwining earthly events into his divine plan. The second one was performed by Joseph himself, who rapidly and decisively cut the possessive relationship with the Potiphar's wife.

Especially the second detachment shows a significant change in Joseph's growth in autonomy and authenticity. Recognizing his personal needs and boundaries as well as discovering his personal moral code Joseph sets a clear limit between "you and me". This is his first clear step of delineating himself as an independent subject with his own independent identity and autonomous will.

2.2. In our world

The domain of possessive relationships is an everyday experience of every human life. Because of the urge to love and be loved people happen to cross boundaries, treating others as objects of their own desire, rather than independent persons. These may be overcaring parents who are protecting their children from any harm, anxiety and difficulty of life. By doing so they bring up a child which is not able to handle life in its own and is forever dependent on his or her parents and other people. It may be an overly possessive friendship or romantic relationship, in which both parties use one another to feed their own emotional hungers. Thus instead of building a healthy and mature relationship they grow even more and more dependent on each other, bringing their relation to ruin. Finally, in most extreme cases, these may be pathological relationships of sexual abuse or sexual harassment, becoming an everyday nightmare in people's homes or places of work. All of such relationships force people to be totally dependent on others, even against their own will. All of them, similarly as in Joseph's case, make people passive, obedient and biddable, unable to free themselves from these constraints. The story of Joseph shows, that there are two steps which can help these people free themselves. Firstly, it is a necessity of the intervention of the third neutral party, both divine and human. Someone who can step in and break the twisted balance between the "oppressor" and the "victim". Someone who can show the truth about this relationship and will be able to carry victims attention away from

the oppressor, enabling him or her to create new relationships elsewhere. Secondly, as Joseph's example shows, there is no "negotiating" in the domain of possessive relationships. Once a relationship has been identified as such, the only efficient way to change it is to cut the relationship radically. Only this definitive, immediate and total detachment provides a "victim" with neutrality necessary to become autonomous and authentic. It may be for a teenager to leave home and study in a different city, for partners to break relationship, for an abused person to make the case public. There are many ways in which one can perform this action of radical detachment.

3. Rivalry

3.1. In Joseph's Story

Rivalry, as I have demonstrated, is the major issue in Joseph's life, as it runs through all his life until the very last moment of his journey towards authenticity and autonomy. It is the totality of Joseph's actions directed against his own brothers, in anger and malice. Its initial form was abusing his position and relationships in order to damage the position of others. An evil way of winning the rat race for the first-born status. The final form of rivalry was Joseph's act's of vengeance. He wanted to hurt his brothers in proportion to how he was hurt himself. All of these acts of violence and bullying prevented Joseph from growing in authenticity and autonomy as well. His identity was defined only in relation to his brothers - "am I better or worse than them?" His actions were guided by competition and anger, vengeance and emotion. Instead of growing up he was forced to continue the competition in order to win it, and, as it was stated explicitly in the text, he was losing control of himself.

The solution to this problem came in a few steps. First of all we have to mention the intervention of a third neutral party, which as before should be ascribed to God himself. It was the third party that began the process by detaching Joseph from the situation of the irresolvable conflict. Similarly the third party intervened at the end in order to force Joseph to face his past, unhealed wounds and hurting memories. In between these two interventions, as I have demonstrated, Joseph finds himself on the neutral ground of Potiphar's and Pharaoh's households. This context of neutrality enables him to reflect about his actions and make decisions about his future. It is only in these neutral environments that Joseph is able to discover his true identity and start acting with autonomy. His self and actions are no longer determined by anger, rivalry, competition or any other person. He has enough space to grow and flourish as an autonomous human being. Thus, in summary, the steps which help Joseph free himself from rivalry and grow in freedom and truth are: detachment, discernment and embracing his past.

3.2. In our world

The domain of rivalry is also close to all people. All people compete for various things all their life. They compete for love, money, power, prestige, attention, justice, items, achievements, etc. These may be brothers competing for their parents' favors, as in the story of Joseph. Students fighting for grades and trying to get to best colleges in the world. Workers competing for better positions in their jobs and companies themselves fighting for clients. Ultimately nations and countries fighting wars over lands, resources, influence and riches. Out of all the issues discussed in this paper, this one is the most obvious destructive force in the world. Rivalry is a serious obstacle in being authentic, as it forces one to define oneself in relation to someone else. It is a constant urge to turn oneself into someone "better" *than* someone else. Or to make someone else "lesser" *than* oneself. It is a constant race of changing one's face in order to catch up and emerge

victorious, adapting to particular criteria of the given "life competition". It makes one forget about who one is. It forces him or her to be unsatisfied with himself or herself as they are, always pushing forward to beat others. It is a wicked force that deprives one from their autonomy, focusing all their thoughts and actions on others, in order to win the competition. One is never free to act on their own, being enslaved by the unending race of constant improvement and rivalry. The story of Joseph is driven mostly by this problem and shows multiple steps of getting through it. First of all, similarly as with possessive relationships, one has to undergo a radical detachment from rivalry. In this case, however, this radical detachment means a severe loss. By losing the competition so badly as Joseph did, one just falls out of rivalry and is in the position of being unable to compete anymore. Such dramatic and crushing experience frees Joseph from rivalry and enables him to grow in autonomy and authenticity. The second step is similar as in the case of self-centeredness. A context of isolation from the outer world and competing relationships enables one to reflect about one's past rivalry and their destructive results, both caused and suffered. One is able to recognize one's true identity, strengths and weaknesses. Basing on one's real qualities one is able to begin a journey of personal growth basing on who they really are, rather than competing with everyone around them. They can focus on their own skills and develop them, they can identify their weaknesses and learn how to deal with them. Once more this step requires a person to perform a conscious assessment of one's past and qualities and make a conscious decision about one's future, planning one's personal development. Finally, as the story shows, rivalry may be a difficult thing to deal with, especially when it is founded on wounds from one's past. Hurting memories and harm suffered from other people only strengthen the will to harm others and compete with them violently. The story shows that, in order to be healed from rivalry, one has to face one's own past with all its shadows, embrace it and accept it wholly. Only then one will be able to act freely and become who one really is.

4. Self-Centeredness

4.1. In Joseph's Story

As I have demonstrated Joseph's self-centeredness was a problem caused by the preferential relationship he suffered from his father. It is mainly visible in the first episode. He acquired an idealistic view of himself, believing himself to be godlike. This was one of the major constraints in Joseph's growth towards authenticity. This twisted unreal image of himself prevented him from discovering his true identity. Furthermore, it influenced Joseph's actions significantly. He was doing everything in order to make his dreams come true, i.e., to maintain his narcissistic position within the family, making himself equal to god and over everyone else.

Joseph's journey of freedom from self-centeredness begun with a radical detachment, initiated by the third party. He was removed from the twisted context within which his self-centeredness was flourishing. Instead of that context he was thrown in the neutral environment of Potphar's and Pharaoh's households. There, similarly as in the case of rivalry, he was able to learn truth about himself. During his two years in prison, being separated from the world, without any possibility for showing off, Joseph discovers his real self. This turn from idealistic self to realistic self happens through the process of discernment.

4.2. In our world

The domain of self-centeredness is also familiar to every human being. People need to be loved and accepted by others, they need to feel appreciated and cared for. People tend to show off in many ways. Some, as Joseph, can use their privileged position in the society, or their extraordinary skills and qualities. Others can play a victim in order to draw people's attention to themselves. If such person gains authority over others, then he or she would use all other people

to serve their twisted self-centered needs. Whatever the approach, the need for attention makes those people to develop an alternative unreal identity, which could enhance their experience of being important. Such approach obscures one's true strengths and weaknesses and twists one's self perception, causing him or her to live in an unreal world of his or her own imaginary identity. As we have seen in the case of Joseph, such strive for attention can totally dominate one's thoughts and motivate all actions. The cure to self-centeredness, as I have demonstrated, can be generally labeled "discernment" and consists of multiple levels. It is a longer time of solitude or separation that makes one see that he or she is not the center of the world. It helps one recognize other people in one's life and one's own need for other people. In the climate of being detached from others one assesses one's relationships and realizes that self-centeredness, at the end of the day, leads to loneliness and death. Moreover, without any attention or praise from the outside, one quickly realizes the truth about oneself, one's true strengths and weaknesses. Everything becomes verified by the reality, showing the pure truth about the person. Everyone enters such context several times in their lives. It happens to a different degree every time people change school, job, begin new hobby or move to another city or country. The more difficult the change, the more chance for turning one's self-centeredness into humility and service. By leaving one's comfort zone and experiencing unexpected struggles of life one can really free oneself from self-centeredness. Obviously, the change itself is never enough. It is just a chance which can be taken or refused. As we have seen in Joseph's story, one has to perform a conscious reflection on one's own life and make a conscious decision about one's own future, whether it will be a self-centered future or the one of service and humility.

5. Identity

5.1. In Joseph's Story

The last constraint discussed in this paper was the domain of masks and labels, which were usually presented in the form of various pieces of clothing. All these masks were obscuring Joseph's identity to himself as well as people around him. The unique tunic made him "the daddy's son", Potiphar's garment defined him as "the man of success", Joseph's own clothing made him look like "wise and discerning" and, finally, all the pieces of clothing put on Joseph by the Pharaoh made him fully Egyptian. As I have demonstrated, throughout the whole story Joseph was always wearing some sort of mask. The only exception was the time spent in prison, which inspired Joseph to create his own mask, rather than be labeled by others.

As we have seen every single mask was removed from him in a dramatic way leaving him in a vulnerable state of being naked. There are two main steps in Joseph's journey towards removing his masks, both of them presented twice. The first one is the act of radical detachment from the mask, which was performed either by other people (selling to Egypt) or by Joseph himself (escaping Potiphar's wife). It is a radical moment of recognizing one's false identity and facing one's true vulnerable self. The second step is a longer period of struggle with one's past, which occurred firstly in the two year period in prison, and, secondly, in the longer period of time between brothers' subsequent visits to Egypt, which was concluded by Judah's speech. This moment of looking back and reflecting on one's life (prison) as well as facing one's hurting memories and past relationships (encounter with brothers) is what helps Joseph discover his true self, accept it and identify with it.

5.2. In our world

Finally, the last topic discussed in this paper is the domain of false identities or masks. It is strongly connected with previous domains and has been mentioned already a few times. We are all social creatures and therefore belong to the complex world of relationships. Faced everyday by peoples' expectations, moods and demands we learn to put on masks which will give us what we need. It may be a mask of a "nice child" in front of parents or teachers, a mask of a "happy man" during socials, a mask of a "perfectionist worker" in front of one's boss, or a mask of "a dude" in front of the girl one wants to invite for a date. Some of them are forged by people on their own, others are forced on them by others. All of these masks, as well as some in the story of Joseph, are designed for a particular purpose and sometimes are useful, if not necessary, in order to achieve it. Nevertheless, any kind of mask *per se* is designed to cover one's true identity in order to serve a particular purpose. A useful mask can with time turn into one's everyday self, forcing him or her to hide their true self from the world. A mask not only negates authenticity, but also forces a person to act according to the particular mask, negating one's autonomy as well.

The story provides a rather harsh wisdom about one's own masks. They bring people into trouble, cannot last long and, when broken, lead to a significant drama and leave people naked. Any mask raises in people a level of tension and anxiety, when trying to act in conformity with the mask. Trying to face expectations of others or maintain detached and distant of one's emotions. As the story suggests, every person is called to the radical detachment of their masks and labels, i.e., to say decisively and sharply "I am not what you want me to be". Additionally, everyone is also called to look into their past and reflect on it. It is by such process of discernment and conscious decision, that one is able to discover one's true face and show it to the world.

5. Final word

The story of Joseph is a story of a typical human being and every reader can see in it reflections of his or her own life. We all struggle for autonomy and authenticity on various levels of our life, including family, groups of friends and society as a whole. We all take part in interpersonal fights, experience difficult relationships and fight against our own demons. We are all invited to make in our lives steps of discernment, detachment and embracing our past, which, as we believe, is actively assisted and overseen by God's caring hand. The story of Joseph, from an anthropological point of view, shows a typical human being thrown into the world of dysfunctional family and highly competing society. He is not a perfect, innocent man. He is, like all of us, a complex person, with his own weaknesses and sins, as well as talents and qualities. This is why his story is so engaging and convincing for a reader, who by reading Joseph's story gets a spark of hope, that no matter the circumstances of his or her life, he or she can be transformed, by growing in authenticity and autonomy. It is a hope that even human wickedness or life catastrophes are at the end of the day in the hands of God and can be turned upside down, according to the divine plan, to become the very means for the salvation of the whole world.

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