

**VERSES: Gn42-03a, Gn42-03b, Gn42-04a, Gn42-05a, Gn42-06a, Gn42-07a, Gn42-08a, Gn42-08b, Gn42-09a, Gn42-09b, Gn42-10a, Gn42-11a, Gn4-11b, Gn42-12a, Gn42-13a, Gn42-14a, Gn42-15a, Gn42-15b, Gn42-16a, Gn42-17a, Gn42-19a, Gn42-19b, Gn42-19c, Gn42-20a, Gn42-21a, Gn42-21b, Gn42-22a, Gn42-23a, Gn42-23b, Gn42-23c, Gn42-24a, Gn42-24b, Gn42-24c, Gn24-42d**

BIBLICAL TEXT: This chapter dealing with the meeting of Joseph and his brothers nicely divides into 3 paragraphs.

PARAGRAPH 1: Gn42-03: 05 – Jacob worried about avoiding accidents

The *theme* of this paragraph is Jacob’s worry *less an accident happens*. The biblical text explains that Jacob didn’t send Benjamin for this reason. But the text, in two places, emphasizes that the 10 brothers came *amidst* the comers to Joseph. The emphasis on *midst* ties in with *less an accident happen*. The brothers were not to be conspicuous; they should blend together with the crowd. Rashi suggests that Jacob actually advised his sons to enter through different portals so as to be inconspicuous; but the driving force is the paragraph theme, *less an accident happen*.

Contrasting within the paragraph the reference to the brothers – sometimes *children of Israel* and sometimes *Joseph’s brothers* - suggests that they wanted to see if they could locate Joseph. Rashi notes the unusual emphasis on numbers: *Joseph’s brothers, the 10 of them*, suggesting that they all had different approaches to Joseph. Rashi does not give details. Perhaps some brothers just wanted to see if he was alive; they didn’t really want him back while other brothers wanted to redeem him.

PARAGRAPH II: Gn42-07:17 – Cross examination of Joseph of his brothers

The theme of this paragraph is verse 8: *Joseph recognized his brothers, but they didn’t recognize him*. The simple meaning of the sentence is of course that Joseph was 17 when he left, he didn’t yet have a beard, and his mannerisms were boyish. (Rashi simply mentions the beard but his general demeanor should also be brought in.)

But the placement of this verse here designates it as a theme sentence. So, this verse acquires an additional meaning in the context of the paragraph: Joseph had mercy and recognized his brothers, but they were cruel to him. The paragraph emphasizes that Joseph dreamt dreams to help them as he was doing now in providing food. It is interesting to compare Joseph’s treatment of his brothers with their treatment of him as shown in the following table

Speaker	Accusation	Confinement	Regret
Joseph	You are spies	Joseph imprisoned	Joseph recanted “I fear God so I will let you bring home food”

		them	
His brothers	You want to reign over us	They threw Joseph in the pit	No mention of fear of God by the brothers is given. Judah simply mentions there is no profit in murder

Thus, the incidents of this paragraph support the general theme.

Rashi also notes how the harsh cross examination led the brothers to start thinking about Joseph. Thus, they admitted to feeling guilty about what they did v21) and under conditions of cross-examination they begin to speak imprecisely as shown by several contrasts. Initially they said, “We are all brothers” while later on they said, “The 12 of use are brothers with one home and one disappeared.” They also spoke in holophrastic sentences (short one-word sentences) “No my lord”.

Although we don’t know exactly what transpired between them it is easy to guess: Joseph knew they entered in different gates because he had records of who came into Egypt. It is very possible that the brothers, eager to find Joseph, were asking about the slave trade in Egypt. So, Joseph lured them into discussing this and pointed out that asking for a country’s slave trade is spying. Rashi learns this from the emphatic pronouns used in the dialogue. *This is exactly why I claimed you were spies.*

To summarize, we don’t know exactly what they spoke about, but normal cross examination procedure would lure them into speaking about their missing brother and their desire to find him.

### PARAGRAPH 3: Gn42-19:24 Guilt, Fear of God, Imprisonment of Shimeon

The brothers spoke among themselves in Hebrew not realizing Joseph could understand them because an interpreter was used. They express guilt about Joseph. During the dialogue it emerges that Reuven defended Joseph. He was the oldest and thus the conversation enlightened Joseph with his innocence. Since Shimeon was 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest he probably advocated killing Joseph. It is not hard to imagine, that people knew that Jacob’s 2 sons Shimeon and Levi destroyed a city in which their sister was raped. So, Joseph was gathering a picture of whom to blame. Rashi gives specific details, but we can focus on high level items like the conversation they were having and their history.

As pointed out above, Joseph emphasizes that he *fears God* a phrase we never find in the brother’s discussion of selling him. He allows them to return with food and to prove their story by bringing Benjamin. (Apparently it didn’t make sense that ten of them came and left one behind). He jailed Shimeon as the one who instigated his sale. Rashi points out that at the time of sale Shimeon probably man-handled him for example pushing him in the pit. The way to take these Rashis is suggestions of the paragraph themes that Joseph took out on the perpetrator of his sale without knowing exactly what details took place. Note: The Rashi comment that he treated Shimon nicely in prison is similar to the way prisoners of war are treated today – they are treated nicely because they offer the opportunity for exchange.

Although we have gone over these Rashi in paragraph form instead of phrase by phrase, the interested reader can go to the texts and see each Rashi comment as fitting into the overall paragraph theme.

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