

Joseph the Divine Trickster¹

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Abstract

On the one hand, the story of Joseph's deception has a close relationship with the other deceitful events in Genesis. On the other hand, the story of Joseph's deception has its unique aspect in the narrative. Although the character of Joseph himself has many unique aspects within the narrative, the deception of Joseph itself also tells a unique story of salvation in Genesis.

Keywords: Genesis; Deception; Joseph; Trickster; Salvation

Introduction

Joseph's case of deception is recorded in Genesis chapters 42 through 44. And it makes up a long storyline compared to other deceptive events in Genesis. There it is described through the process by which he meets his brothers twice in Egypt. Interestingly enough, all the other deceptive events do not exceed one chapter in Genesis.² Even the case of the serpent and the woman, the first deceitful event in Genesis, does not go beyond Genesis 3. It can be said that Joseph's deception case is closer to a story than an event. Why does the narrator take so long the story of Joseph's deception in Genesis? This article begins with this question. And I will try to answer that question by taking a closer look at their two encounters. In this paper, I will look for similarities between Joseph's deception story and other deception events. At the same time, I will also discover the differences between the story and the other events. Then I will see what they mean throughout the Genesis narrative.

The first event

To buy food, Joseph's brothers leave Canaan and arrive in Egypt; then they meet Joseph and bow down to him (Gn. 42:6). At that time, Joseph recognises his brothers, but pretends not to know them:

¹ This article is a rework of the chapter "Joseph the divine trickster" (Lee 2022:157–201) of my thesis. The chapter was to demonstrate how Joseph was able to put an end to all the other deceptive events of Genesis through an etiological narratological point of view (Lee 2022:17–25). On the other hand, this article demonstrates how Joseph was able to save his people by closely observing two encounters with his brothers.

² Cf. the serpent's deception of the woman in Gn. 3; Abram's deception of Pharaoh in Gn. 12; Sarah's deception of the Lord in Gn. 18; Abraham's deception of Abimelech in Gn. 20; Sarah's deception of Abimelech in Gn. 20; Isaac's deception of Abimelech in Gn. 26; Rebekah's deception of Isaac in Gn. 27; Jacob's deception of Isaac in Gn. 27; Leah's deception of Jacob in Gn. 29; Laban's deception of Jacob in Gn. 29; Laban's deception of Jacob in Gn. 31; Rachel's deception of Laban in Gn. 31; Jacob's deception of Laban in Gn. 31; Jacob's sons' deception of the Shechemites in Gn. 34; Joseph's brothers' deception of Jacob in Gn. 37; Tamar's deception of Judah in Gn. 38; Potiphar's wife's deception of the Egyptians in Gn. 39 (Lee 2022:47–68).

נִירָא יוֹסֵף אֶת־אֶחָיו וַיַּכְרֵם וַיַּהֲנִכֵּר אֲלֵיכֶם קָשָׁוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיכֶם מַאֲוִן בְּאַתֶּם וַיֹּאמֶר מְאֹרֶץ כְּנָעַן לְשָׁבֵר־אָכֶל

“And Joseph saw his brothers, and he recognised them, but he pretended not to recognise them, and he spoke to them roughly, and he said to them, ‘Where have you come from?’ And they said, ‘From the land of Canaan, to buy food’” (Gn. 42:7).

Waltke (2001:545) asserts that “he pretended [means] [I]literally ‘he made himself unrecognizable.’ There may be a word play between *hitnakkēl*, ‘they plotted’ ([Gn.] 37:18), and *hitnakker*, ‘he pretended’ [Gn. 42:7]”. But if the reader does not read Genesis 37 to 42 as a narrative, this wordplay may not stand out. Rather, given the fact that *וַיַּהֲנִכֵּר* in Genesis 42:7 reminds them of *וַיַּחֲנֹלְוּ* in Genesis 37:18, it seems to play a role in showing how the story of Genesis 42 and the story of Genesis 37 relate to each other. That is, Joseph is now acting to deceive his brothers in front of them because they plotted against him to kill him, although they did not do so but instead sold him to the Ishmaelites and deceived their father to conceal the fact. The narrator appears to connect the two scenes in some sense, especially the brothers’ deception in Genesis 37 and Joseph’s deception in Genesis 42. In this sense, while a wordplay may be a literary device that the narrator intentionally utilises in the narrative, an etiological element could be a literary technique that might only be seen by those who remember the related elements in advance (although many times the narrator is directly making etiological comments within the story).³ At any rate, Genesis 42:7 is the real beginning of Joseph’s deception of his brothers. And as Reno (2010:279) puts it, Joseph’s “deceptions and subterfuges dictate the sequence of events”. What is noteworthy is that the root of the verb “he recognised them” (מִקְרָם [hiphil]) is the same as that of the verb “he pretended not to recognise” (וַיַּחֲנֹר [hithpael]) his brothers, i.e., בָּכֶר. In one verse, two words derived from one root through two stems create antithetical meanings without any negation. His deception begins with the narrator’s intensive as well as artistic wordplay. What is also notable is that he can recognise his brothers but his brothers cannot recognise him (Gn. 42:8). Unlike in Genesis 42:7, in Genesis 42:8, the negative term לֹא is used to describe the difference in perception between Joseph and his brothers. More than twenty years have passed since Joseph and his brothers separated. Nevertheless, Joseph is able to recognise his brothers, but they are not able to recognise him. And this obvious difference becomes the most important factor that makes deception possible for Joseph. As Waltke (2001:545) puts it, “[r]ecognize’ ([Gn.] 37:32–33) was a key word in the brothers’ deception of Jacob; now it is a crucial word behind Joseph’s deception of them”.

After seeing his brothers, Joseph thinks of the dreams he previously had (Gn. 42:9; cf. Gn. 37:7,9). Sarna (1989:293) indicates that “Hebrew ‘ervat ha-’arets [Gn. 42:9] has its analogy in Isaiah 20:4, ‘the nakedness of Egypt,’ in the sense of ‘the shame of Egypt’ as a conquered state. Similarly, at the downfall of Jerusalem, peoples are said to ‘have seen her disgraced’ (Lam. 1:8)”. Before that, however, the first thing that comes to the reader’s mind is the nakedness of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2–3. And the nakedness

³ Remarkably, in many cases, it is the etiological elements that remind the reader of the deception case in Genesis 3; e.g., Abraham and Sarah’s deception (Gn. 20), Rebekah and Jacob’s deception (Gn. 27), Laban and Leah’s deception (Gn. 29), Rachel’s deception (Gn. 31), Potiphar’s wife’s deception (Gn. 39), etc. Not only that, but there are also elements that remind each other of each other among the deception cases other than the first one (Gn. 12; 18; 20; 26; 27; 29; 31; 34; 37; 38; 39; 42; 44).

discussed in Genesis 42:9 (עֲרָבָה) seems closer to that of Genesis 3:7 (עִירָמִים) than to that of Genesis 2:25 (עַרְבָּאִים); that is to say, the negative reference to “nakedness”.⁴ This may be the thought that comes to his mind after seeing his brothers bow down to Joseph:

וַיֹּסֶף הָאֲחֵר הַשְׁלִיט עַל-הָאָרֶץ וְהָאֲחֵר יָסֶף וַיָּשֶׂם כָּל-עַם הָאָרֶץ וַיָּבֹא אֶחָד יוֹסֵף וַיָּשֶׂם כָּל-עַמּוֹד לְפָנָיו אֶפְרַיִם אֶרְצָה
“And Joseph himself was the ruler over the land; he was the one who was selling to all the people of the land, and Joseph’s brothers came, and they bowed themselves before him *with their faces to the ground*” (Gn. 42:6).

Steinmann (2019:396) asserts that “[p]erhaps this double identification of Joseph as both ruler and dispenser of grain is meant to evoke readers’ memories of his two dreams, where he was ruler (the stars bowing to him) and the most important gatherer of grain (the sheaves bowing to his sheaf)”. In its place, however, the odd thing is that Joseph suddenly calls them spies and states that they come to see the nakedness of the land (Gn. 42:9). Why the spies and the nakedness?⁵ Levenson (2016:117) points out that “[t]he accusation is psychologically acute: Joseph was stripped, if not naked then close to it, by the brothers before they threw him into the pit, and Potiphar’s wife stripped him in anticipation of sexual relations”. Not only that, but it may also be reminiscent of the serpent’s deception in Genesis 3. Formerly, the Lord placed Adam in the garden of Eden, where he was to work and keep the garden (Gn. 2:15). But he allowed the serpent to talk freely with his wife in Eden (Gn. 3:1–5). In other words, he failed to protect his wife from the serpent in the garden. If the man had been listening to the serpent talking to his wife, he would surely have known that the serpent was deceiving his wife. If so, the man would have had a hard time escaping his responsibility for not keeping her from him. If the man had been unaware that the serpent was talking to his wife, he might not have been directly responsible for it. However, it means that he did not know in advance how cunning the serpent was, and this also raises questions about whether he was doing his job well. If the man had known that the serpent was such a cunning character, he should have certainly protected his wife from him. In any case, that caused the woman to be deceived by the serpent into eating the fruit she should not have eaten together with her husband (Gn. 3:6), and this must have caused them to feel ashamed and even fearful of their nakedness (Gn. 3:7–10). Here, it appears instead that Joseph is trying to do well what Adam did not do well, given that he is the ruler of the land as well as the provider of the grain in Egypt (cf. Gn. 1:26,28). The narrator seems to show the antithetical scene

⁴ It is interesting to compare the words meaning “naked(ness)” שְׁרוֹפִים in Gn. 3:7 (or שְׁרוֹרִים in Gn. 2:25) and שְׁרוּךְ in Gn. 42:9,12; because these words all appear in the first and last occurrences of all the deceptive events in Genesis. If the Hebrew root שָׁרֵר (or שָׁרָה) is a by-form of the root שָׁרַם, then the root of שְׁרוֹפִים in Gn. 3:7 (or שְׁרוֹרִים in Gn. 2:25) and the root of שְׁרוּךְ in Gn. 42:9,12 are the same. If this is the case, it can also be seen that שְׁרוֹפִים in the first deception case and שְׁרוּךְ in the last deception case act as inclusios of all the deception cases in the narrative. In effect, HALOT already sees that the root of these two words, שְׁרוֹפִים (or שְׁרוֹרִים) and שְׁרוּךְ, is the same: שָׁרָה. On the other hand, BDB sees that the root of שְׁרוֹפִים (or שְׁרוֹרִים) is שָׁרֵר, whereas the root of שְׁרוּךְ is שָׁרָה. At the same time, however, it sees that the root שָׁרַם also has the meaning of *strip* (Gn. 30:37; 2 Chr. 28:15; Ezk. 31:8); that is, the root שָׁרַם may be a substitute for the root שָׁרֵר. For a more detailed argument, see Lee (2022:26–32).

⁵ Brayford (2007:420–421) indicates that “[d]uring its intermediate periods, Egypt suffered from foreign invasions. Therefore, Joseph’s mocking accusation would have been a serious indictment against such would-be spies”. But even if it was not, the fact that they are accused of being spies would have been a very serious situation in the narrative.

now.

Joseph's false charges are repeated once more (Gn. 42:12). As in Genesis 42:9, the narrator continues to describe seeing others' nakedness as extremely bad behaviour in Genesis 42:12. This reminds the reader of the event of Noah (Gn. 9:22). Noah was a righteous and blameless man in his day (Gn. 6:9). But he could not just ignore what his son told his brothers about after seeing him naked. Therefore, he cursed his son for what his son had done to him (Gn. 9:24–25). To be precise, Noah cursed Ham's son Canaan for the wrong Noah's son Ham had done. Instead, Shem and Japheth were rather blessed for what they had done to their father (Gn. 9:23). But on two occasions, Canaan was cursed (Gn. 9:26–27). One thing to note is that just as the Hebrew word עָרָוֹת “nakedness” is repeated twice in Genesis 42:9 and 42:12, the same word עָרָוֹת “nakedness” is repeated twice in Genesis 9:22 and 9:23. In Genesis, there are a total of four verses in which the word עָרָוֹת is used, and it seems difficult to say that it is a coincidence that the same word is repeated in such a similar way twice. This reminds the reader of מְעָרָוֹת and עִירָוֹת in Genesis 2:25 and 3:7. Each of these words appears only once in Genesis, and the two words have the same meaning “naked” (although the former has a positive connotation, and the latter has a negative connotation). Besides, עִירָם “naked” in Genesis 3:10 and 3:11 is used only twice in the narrative as well. The reader should remember that except in Genesis 2:25, all these words signifying “naked(ness)” are used in a negative sense in Genesis, and it is because he and his wife were disrespectful regarding what the Lord had said to Adam in Genesis 2:17: מֹתָת קָמָה “you shall die to die”.⁶ There too, the Hebrew root מות “die” was used twice. In effect, this was not the only case in Genesis where the root מות was repeated twice and written in the same syntax. The tautological infinitive was used when the serpent completely distorted the phrase of God in Genesis 2:17: לֹא־מֹתָת קָמָה “you shall not die to die” (Gn. 3:4). Another time was when God was explaining what would happen to Abimelech if he did not return Sarah to Abraham: מֹתָת קָמָה “you shall die to die” (Gn. 20:7). And finally, it was used when Abimelech warned his people not to harm Isaac and Rebekah: מֹתָת יִמְתָּה “he shall be killed to die” (Gn. 26:11). Surprisingly enough, all of these happened within the deception cases in Genesis. And the very beginning of those was God's phrase to Adam. In addition, concerning the nakedness in Genesis 9 again, it was they who were blessed, but it was their descendants who were cursed in the narrative. And this is also reminiscent of the man and the woman in Genesis 2–3. There was a time when Adam and Eve were happy even though they were naked, and that happiness was their own (Gn. 2:25). But their nakedness turned into shame and fear (Gn. 3:7–10), and the shame and fear extended to their descendants (Gn. 3:15).

The answer his brothers give Joseph is quite amusing (Gn. 42:11). Hamilton (1995:521) indicates that “[f]irst, they affirm they are a family, and then they describe themselves as *honest* or ‘forthright’ (*kēnîm*). This is the only chapter in the OT in which

⁶ This tautological infinitive is also translated as: מֹתָת קָמָה “you shall surely die” (ESV, NASB, NKJ, etc.). However, this translation does not properly preserve the meaning of the actual use of the same root twice in Hebrew. Moreover, the translation is not intended to clearly show the difference when compared to other Hebrew words that should actually be translated in the sense of “surely”: הַנְּאָזֶן קָרְבָּנָה אֶלְקָרְבָּנָה בְּקָרְבָּנָה רַק אָזֶן קָרְבָּנָה “Surely there is no fear of God in this place” (Gn. 20:11); הַאֲזֶן קָרְבָּנָה אָזֶן קָרְבָּנָה “Behold, she is surely your wife” (Gn. 26:9). Hence, I tried to translate as literally as possible to make the best use of the meaning of the tautological infinitive.

the plural of this word occurs". Do they want to be unique like their brother? But they do not appear to be what they say. The reader appears to be watching a comedy right here, for they are now hearing from their mouths that they are honest. The narrator's sense of humour seems really unique. They are Joseph's brothers, who sold him as a slave to the Ishmaelites, and who, by hiding that fact from Jacob, made their father suffer death (Gn. 37:35). Their deception was so perfect that even their father Jacob, who had been the master of deception, did not notice for over twenty years. While Joseph's deception is the deceit that is told through the longest verses in Genesis, his brothers' deception was the deceit that lasted the longest periods in the narrative. From this point of view, it is strange to hear that they proclaim themselves to be honest men.

Concerning fear, Genesis 42 shares both similarities and differences with Genesis 20. Joseph is confessing that he fears God (Gn. 42:8), while Abraham believed that the people of Gerar did not fear God (Gn. 20:11). Either way, however, both deceive their victims out of their fear: Joseph fears God, while Abraham feared that the Gerarites did not fear God. Adam and Eve became fearful because of the serpent's deception (Gn. 3:10), but Joseph and Abraham deceive others through their fear. But his words of fear of God make the reader a little puzzled. What makes those words of Joseph interesting is that he seems reluctant to use God's name to deceive his brothers (Gn. 42:15–16). In effect, it is Joseph's deception that he calls his brothers spies (Gn. 42:9,14) and that he gets his steward to put his cup in Benjamin's bag (Gn. 44:2). Furthermore, it may be out of his deceit that he has a feast with his brothers in his house (Gn. 43:31–34) and that he (or his steward) pretends that he plays divination with his cup (Gn. 44:5,15). Eventually, however, his confession that Joseph fears God appears to be true. Given that, it is likely that he, the vizier of Egypt, deceives them to reassure them that he is afraid of God; for they do not know that he is Joseph until then. It can be said that the vizier deceives them through the fact that Joseph fears God. Joseph's acts of secretly giving them silver are considered similar. He never denounces his brothers with the silver he secretly hid in their bag. So in some ways, those actions of Joseph may be another form of charity. However, he does not honestly give them the silver, and they must suffer quite a bit of fear because of those facts (Gn. 42:28,35; 43:18). Nevertheless, his sincerity in his charity towards his brothers remains the same. Ultimately, therefore, what Joseph wants may be to give some reassurance to his brothers by informing them that the vizier fears their God too, so that they can somehow bring his brother Benjamin to Egypt.

During their first meeting, the narrator teaches the reader a crucial fact:

וְהַם לֹא יְדֻעּוּ כִּי שָׁמַעْ יוֹסֵף כִּי הַפָּלִיא בֵּיןָתָם

"And they themselves did not know that Joseph understood *them*, for the interpreter was between them" (Gn. 42:23).

Hamilton (1995:527–528) indicates that "[t]his is only place in Genesis where a third person is needed for two peoples speaking different languages. There was no mention of an interpreter when Abraham was with Pharaoh (ch. 12) or with the Philistine Abimelech (ch. 21), or when Isaac was with Abimelech (ch. 26), or when Jacob was with Laban in Mesopotamia (chs. 29–31). Joseph is maintaining his incognito role". Through this scene, the narrator appears to go on to speak of the superiority of Joseph's knowledge. On the contrary, he is at the same time showing the inferiority of the knowledge of the brothers.

In other words, what Joseph knows they do not know, and this fact continues to lay the groundwork for his deception. Based on this phenomenon, it might have been said that the reason the woman was deceived by the serpent was that she did not understand God's words rightly. She stated the reason why she ate it:

וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה כֹּחֶשׁ הַשְׁמַנִּי וְאָכַל

“And the woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate’” (Gn. 3:13b).

If she had understood God's words correctly, she might not have been deceived by the serpent. Thus, Adam's responsibility for their disobedience to the Lord appears greater than hers in that it was Adam who heard firsthand (Gn. 2:16–17). The man might not have told his wife exactly about the words which God spoke to him. Oddly enough, Adam just took what Eve gave and ate it:

וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר בָּתְמַתָּה עָמַקְתִּי הוּא נְתָנָה לִי מִן-הַעַץ וְאָכַל

“And the man said, ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she herself gave me from the tree, and I ate’” (Gn. 3:12).

He seems to be blaming God here. At any rate, these words of Adam make it clear that his fault was greater, for he understood the words of the Lord and nevertheless still ate the forbidden fruit.

Joseph chooses Simeon out of his ten brothers and puts him in prison (Gn. 42:24). But why Simeon? Hamilton (1995:528) argues that “[i]n one respect, Simeon, the second-born son of Leah, is an ideal choice to detain, while the remaining nine brothers return to Canaan to bring down to Egypt Benjamin, the second-born son of Rachel”. Or else, Joseph may intend to find a way that can least shock his father, Jacob. Simeon, along with his younger brother Levi, killed all the men of the city of the Shechemites (Gn. 34:25–26), and that event put a lot of pressure on Jacob (Gn. 34:30). In effect, this incident was no less serious than Reuben's affair with Bilhah (Gn. 35:22), given that because of that incident, Simeon and Levi could not have the birthright after Reuben. After Simeon's imprisonment, to be precise, from Genesis 43:1, Judah comes to represent his brothers before his father (Gn. 43:1–14) and before the one who seems like the king of Egypt (Gn. 44:18–34).

In the course of his story, Joseph weeps a great deal: וַיַּנִּזְקַע “he wept” (Gn. 42:24); וַיַּנִּזְקַע “he wept” (Gn. 43:30); וַיַּנִּזְקַע אֶת-קְלִילוֹ בְּבָכִי “he wept very loudly” (Gn. 45:2); וַיַּנִּזְקַע “he wept” (Gn. 45:14); וַיַּנִּזְקַע “he wept” (Gn. 45:15); וַיַּנִּזְקַע “he wept” (Gn. 46:29); וַיַּנִּזְקַע “he wept” (Gn. 50:1); וַיַּנִּזְקַע “he wept” (Gn. 50:17). Mathews (2005:791) indicates that “[t]he Joseph narrative often depicts Joseph weeping when restored to his family.... If Jeremiah is the so-called ‘weeping prophet,’ Joseph is the ‘weeping patriarch’”. Joseph indeed weeps many times, but the reader does not know why he cries. The narrator never tells them why. Perhaps some may say that these cries of Joseph are due to a sense of guilt from deceiving his brothers. So it would be said that that could also be a self-blame. In any case, putting it all together, he cries a total of eight times in Genesis 42–50. And these are all tears that flow after he meets his brothers. Among them, his crying in Genesis 45:2 is a big cry different from the others (וַיַּנִּזְקַע אֶת-קְלִילוֹ בְּבָכִי). And remarkably, all the other seven times he cries are the same type of crying (וַיַּנִּזְקַע). Of these seven cries, the first two

are cries secretly hidden away from his brothers. But with that big cry as a turning point, the other five cryings become tears that he cries openly in front of other people. And the weeping that he cries aloud in Genesis 45:2 has a special tendency as well. At the time, Joseph shows himself weeping before his brothers, but he hides it from the Egyptians (Gn. 45:1). There should be a reason he does not want to show the Egyptians how he is crying. In addition, it is noteworthy that the Hebrew word בְּכִי used to express his “weeping” in Genesis 45:2 is only used once in Genesis. The word בְּכִי “weeping” is used once more in the entire Pentateuch, which is the great weeping that the children of Israel weep for thirty days after Moses dies (Dt. 34:8). In this respect, the weeping that Joseph weeps alone is comparable to the weeping that all the Israelites weep together for thirty days.

Among the events in which Joseph weeps, an unusual expression stands out (Gn. 43:30). Goldingay (2020:640) asserts that “[o]nce more Joseph cries, and the narrator uses the word *rahāmîm*, which Jacob used in v. 14 [of ch. 43].... It is the plural of the word for a womb in [Gn.] 20:18; 29:31; 30:22, which can thus point to a mother’s compassion for her children, but here [Gn. 43:30] it suggests the fellow feeling of two people born from the same womb”. And Eskenazi and Weiss (2008:248) maintain that “Heb. *rachamim* (literally ‘innards’ [Gn. 43:30]—taken as the bodily locus of compassion) is not gender specific, unlike *rechem* (womb), which only women possess”. It is noteworthy that the Hebrew word רְחָמִים is never used for a woman in Genesis; it is used only twice in the narrative, once for Jacob (Gn. 43:14) and another for Joseph (Gn. 43:30). Instead, Brueggemann (1982:340) is rather interested in the verb which takes it as its subject:

Joseph is “warm” for Benjamin ([Gn.] 43:30). The term *kmr* (RSV, “yearned”) is used in a parallel way only in Hos. 11:8 referring to Yahweh’s passion for Israel.... The phrases of Gen. 43:30 and Hos. 11:8 are close parallels and may be used to interpret each other. What is said here of Joseph, Hosea dares to say of God. The deep yearning and profound emotional response are parallel in the two dramatic portrayals.

The verb that expresses God’s sorrowful feelings toward Israel now describes Joseph’s innermost being. This again reminds the reader that his weeping is compared to the weeping of the entire nation of Israel for thirty days (Gn. 45:2; cf. Dt. 34:8). Another remarkable fact is that after Joseph weeps, he washes his face (Gn. 43:31). Steinmann (2019:406) points out that “this [Gn. 43:31] is the only mention in the Old Testament of someone washing his or her face”. Given that washing a face is not unusual, it is indeed unusual that this description appears only once in the entire Old Testament. Here, Joseph becomes involved with something unusual as well. After all, he must wash away his sincerity for the deception that has to go on.

The second event

To buy food, Joseph’s brothers leave Canaan for Egypt a second time, and then Jacob’s sons are reunited (Gn. 43:15). First of all, his brothers bow down to Joseph again and again (Gn. 43:26,28). Mathews (2005:790) argues that “[b]owed low to pay him honor’ (v. 28 [of ch. 43]) renders the complementary verbs ‘bowed down’ (*qādad*) and

‘prostrated’ (*hāwā*), which often occur together to express homage to God (cf. [Gn.] 24:26,48) and occasionally reverence for royalty, as here (e.g., 1 Sam 24:8[9]”). In Genesis 43:28, his brothers bow down to Joseph in the same way that others bow down to God or their king. However, they already bowed to him a while ago in Genesis 43:26. Why do they bow down to Joseph twice in Genesis 43:26 and 28 respectively? Their first bow to Joseph in Genesis 43:26 is probably a sign of courtesy that they are required to show the vizier of Egypt. And their second bow to Joseph in Genesis 43:28 may be one on behalf of Joseph’s parents. That is to say, the reason they bow twice to Joseph in Genesis 43:28 may be not only on behalf of his beloved father Jacob but also on behalf of his deceased mother Rachel. And the way his brothers bow down to him twice after confessing their father Jacob before Joseph as his servant seems to show that his dreams are being realised. In effect, Joseph had two earlier dreams. His first dream was that Joseph’s sheaf was surrounded by his brothers’ sheaves and they bowed down by it (Gn. 37:7). His second dream was that the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him (Gn. 37:9). Accordingly, Joseph’s first dream appears to be fulfilled when they bow down in Genesis 43:26, and his second dream seems to be fulfilled when they bow down twice in Genesis 43:28. In this sense, their bowing to Joseph when they first met him in Egypt could not fit either of Joseph’s two dreams, because Benjamin was missing from among them, nor did they ever bow down to Joseph on his behalf (Gn. 42:6). For that reason, in a sense, Joseph must have ordered his brothers to bring Benjamin at the first encounter.

After his brothers bow down, Joseph confirms with his own eyes that among them is his full brother (Gn. 43:29). Brueggemann (1982:341) suggests that “[t]he release of Jacob: El Shaddai grant you mercy (*rahāmîm*) ([Gn.] 43:14). The welcome of Joseph: God be gracious (*hānan*) to you, my son ([Gn.] 43:29). These are not lines taken at random. The father wishes God’s mercy (*rahāmîm*). The brother wishes that God would be gracious (*hānan*)”. Indeed, Benjamin appears to be loved by his father Jacob (Gn. 42:4,36,38), by his full-brother Joseph (Gn. 43:29), and even by his half-brother Judah (Gn. 44:33). Furthermore, unlike Joseph, Benjamin does not seem to be hated by any of his other brothers. After asking his brothers a question, Joseph greets Benjamin with a blessing without receiving an answer from them (Gn. 43:29). He cannot stand even that brief time. He probably wanted to convey the words to his full brother for over twenty years, but he was not able. To Joseph, the few seconds of waiting for their answer could feel longer than twenty years. For another reason, Joseph does not have to wait for their reply, in that he already knows the answer to that question (Gn. 43:29). Although he has not seen his younger brother for over twenty years, he is immediately able to recognise who he is. Wenham (2000:423) indicates that “[m]y son’ [Gn. 43:29] expresses friendliness between two unrelated men of unequal status (1 Sam 3:16; 4:16; 26:21, 25)”. Yet, in a way, he can call his brother his son because he loves him that much as well.

As soon as he sees his younger brother Benjamin for the first time in over twenty years, the thing Joseph wants most to do is eat with him (Gn. 43:16). As Steinmann (2019:404) puts it, “[s]ince in antiquity there were no electric lights by which to eat an evening meal, the major meal on most days was eaten at noon”. For the people of ancient times, it would certainly have been difficult after the sun had completely set for numerous people to eat and drink together. At their meal, curiously, the brothers and the Egyptians each eat separately (Gn. 43:32). Wenham (2000:423) suggests that “[h]ere [Gn. 43:32] a very strong term is used: *חוּבָה* ‘disgusting’ is often translated ‘abomination’ in

religious texts that describe practices totally abhorrent to God (e.g., Lev 18:22, 26, 29)". It appears that the Egyptians at that time had quite a sense of cultural superiority. But so far, it seems that he does not want to change the order:

וַיַּשְׁבּוּ לִפְנֵיו הַבָּכָר כִּבְכָרָתוֹ וַיַּעֲשֵׂר כָּעֵרתוֹ וַיַּתְהִמֵּם הָאֶנְשִׁים אִישׁ אֶל־רֶעֶה

And they sat before him [Joseph], the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth, and the men [Joseph's brothers] looked at one another in astonishment" (Gn. 43:33).

Hartley (2000:337) claims that "Joseph had arranged for them to sit in that order both to keep his brothers off guard and to give them significant evidence that would establish his true identity whenever he chose to reveal himself to them". If it was so, then Joseph would be preparing to reveal who he was. However, at this point, he may be busier consolidating his deception than preparing for his revelation. More exactly, it appears that he is showing off his discretion and wisdom through what he is aware of and what they are not aware of. Furthermore, the narrator clarifies that Joseph weeps loudly before his revelation to his brothers because he cannot contain his emotions (Gn. 45:1–2). This fact seems to emphasise that it is an accidental rather than planned happening. At that point, he may plan another deception. As Kidner (1967:216) sees, "[t]he mysterious accuracy of the seating order would have its part to play in Joseph's plan, by increasing the brothers' uneasy sense of exposure to divine intervention". And this may help him trick his brothers with his cup the next day.

Regarding Joseph's character, Brueggemann (1982:336–337) argues:

In [Genesis] chapter 37, he is a naïve and guileless boy. In [Genesis] chapters 39–41, he is a noble and effective man of integrity who is not intimidated by the royal woman ([Gn.] 39), the royal officers ([Gn.] 40), nor even the Pharaoh ([Gn.] 41). But in [Genesis] 42–44, he is now a ruthless and calculating governor.... He not only manipulates the scene but seems to relish his power to intimidate and threaten.

Here, what the reader must remember is that during the events of Genesis 42–44, Joseph is deceiving his brothers. Therefore, it should be borne in mind that elements appearing in these three chapters, such as the silver (ףְּסָרֶת [Gn. 42:25,27,28,35(×2); 43:12(×2),15,18,21(×2),22(×2),23; 44:1,2,8]) and the cup (עַגְלָה [Gn. 44:2(×2),12,16,17]), may be used as tools to exploit and deceive. Moreover, the fact that Joseph rules on behalf of Pharaoh as the vizier in Egypt, that he marries the daughter of the priest of On in Egypt, and that he is even called by the name of Zaphenath-Paneah in Egypt may also be a means of his deception (Gn. 41:40–45). Concerning the indigenous name, particularly, as Provan (2015:179) puts it, "[t]he meaning of Joseph's new name has attracted some attention in the interpretative tradition: 'revealer of secrets' (Josephus, Syriac, Targum, working with the HB.); 'savior of the world' (Vulgate, deriving from the Coptic); 'the god speaks and he lives' (working with the Egyptian language itself). It is impossible to be certain what is intended". Although the exact meaning of the name may be unknown, it seems evident that it is a great name. By that great Egyptian name, Joseph is deceiving to deceive his victims. Probably what the reader can be sure of is his sincerity when he weeps twice in the process of deceiving (Gn. 42:24; 43:30). Then who

is the objective of the deception? Is it only his brothers?

Of the things Joseph uses to deceive his brothers, the role of the cup appears a little more unique, given that it is associated with a more distinctive expression: שָׁׁמְךָ נְהַשׁ “he [Joseph] shall divine to divine” (Gn. 44:5,15). Hamilton (1995:559) indicates that “[w]hat makes the cup in Benjamin’s sack so valuable is that it is Joseph’s own cup, and the *one in which he practices divination* (*nahēš y^enahēš*). The force here of the infinitive absolute (*nahēš*) before the verb is uncertain; usually it lends extra emphasis to the verb”. But this is not the first time this distinctive syntax has been used in the narrative; the phrase, used twice in Genesis 44:5 and 44:15, is reminiscent of Genesis 2:17: מוֹת מוֹתָה “you [Adam] shall die to die”.⁷ Mainly, the reason Joseph claims to be a man who can divine to divine may be to conceal the fact that the discovery of his cup in Benjamin’s bag was his play. However, as Steinmann (2019:409) notes, “[t]he irony is, of course, that he was without his divining cup and thus unequipped to do what he claimed. This is another clue that Joseph’s claim of practising divination was simply a ploy to apply pressure on his brothers in one last test of their sincerity”. In fact, Joseph can divine well without his cup (although even that is his trick). André (1995:365) points out the following:

Joseph divines (*nahēš, y^enahēš*) with the silver cup found in Benjamin’s sack (Gen. 44:5,15).... In Nu. 24:1, the summary phrase *liqra’ t n^eḥāšim* refers to the fact that Yahweh spoke to Balaam and came to him ([Nm.] 22:8–12,19,38), that Balaam knew (*yāda’*) what Yahweh said ([Nm.] 22:19), and that Yahweh met (*qārā*) him and spoke with him ([Nm.] 23:3–5).

Just as God gives Balaam what he has to know, the Lord seems to give Joseph what he needs to know. Moreover, in particular, it should be noted that the verb שָׁׁמְךָ used in Genesis 44:5 and 44:15 has the same consonants as the noun שָׁׁמְךָ referring to the serpent in Genesis 3:1.⁸ In Joseph’s deception story, the phrase שָׁׁמְךָ שָׁׁמְךָ in Genesis 44:5 and 44:15 appears to illuminate the phrase מוֹת מוֹתָה in Genesis 2:17 and the word שָׁׁמְךָ in Genesis 3:1 at the same moment. So what does this phrase in the story signify? The important thing is that Joseph is now deceiving his victims twice repeatedly with that phrase. In other words, he is deceiving his victims by using the term “the serpent” twice as a verb in succession.⁹ That is, he is now communicating with his victims through that

⁷ Williams (2007:85), regarding “[i]nfinitive absolute to emphasize a verb of the same root,” points out that “[t]he combination of an infinitive absolute and a finite verb of the same root can indicate emphasis of various types, such as affirming that the action of the verb is very certain to occur. The finite verb does not need to be in the same stem...as the infinitive absolute, but it must have the same root...”. See more examples in Gn. 18:10; 22:17; 26:11; 27:30; 31:15,30; 37:8; 43:7; 46:4.

⁸ DCH sees that the verb שָׁׁמְךָ means “practice divination,” “practice augury,” “learn by divination,” “observe omens” or “become rich” from the Piel stem. It also explains that as a noun שָׁׁמְךָ can mean not only “serpent” but also “divination”. Fabry (1998:357) also indicates that “[t]he Hebrew verb *nihēš*, ‘seek or give omens, prognosticate,’ also occurs in Aramaic, Syriac, and Mandaic. It is often associated with Arab. *nahisa*, in the fifth stem ‘investigate,’ with the derived noun *nahāš*, ‘spell, omen’”. It seems to have some common denominator when used as a verb and as a noun.

⁹ Alden (1980:572) suggests that “[b]ecause of the similarity of *nahash* to *nāhāš* (q.v.) meaning ‘snake,’ some make connection to snakecharming. More contend that there is a similarity of hissing sounds between enchanters and serpents and hence the similarity of words”. Just as the serpent falsely seduced the woman, so now it appears that Joseph is deceiving his victims.

syntax in a way that hints at what he is deceiving, viz., in a way that he may be deceiving not one, but two. In that case, whom does Joseph deceive to deceive whom? First, Joseph is deceiving his brothers. But ultimately, it may be the Egyptians that he intends to deceive as well. As Longman (2016:511) as well sees, Joseph “certainly shows himself to be as shrewd as a snake in his dealings with his brothers as well as Egyptians...”. Through his deception, Joseph may act to appear fully assimilated into Egypt. For that reason, he appears to marry an Egyptian woman and live under the Egyptian name as the vizier of the Egyptians. Of course, his cup should be seen as a device to show that he is living like an Egyptian high official.¹⁰ Why, then, does Joseph try to deceive the Egyptians as well? As we have seen, he was enslaved for ten years for his brothers’ deceit. Furthermore, he was imprisoned for three years because of an Egyptian’s deceit. Just as he has to deceive his brothers, he has to deceive the Egyptians as well. But there is one more important reason, possibly to save his people. Joseph knows that they should live in Goshen, for when he hears Judah’s long speech, he cannot hold back his tears for a moment, and he reveals to his brothers who he is, but he knows that they must live in Goshen:

וַיֹּשֶׁבְתֶּן בְּאֶרְצֵגֶשׁ וְהִיְתֶּן קָרוֹב אֲלֵיכָה וּבְנֶיךָ וּבְנֶיךָ וּצְאָנָךְ וּבְקָרְךָ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לָךְ

“And you shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me; you, and your children, and your children’s children, and your flock, and your herd, and all that you have” (Gn. 45:10).¹¹

Not only that, but there seems to be another reason lurking as well, given that Joseph appears to know that the period they have to live in Goshen will not be short: “you, and your children, and your children’s children” (Gn. 45:10). Just as the reader does not know exactly how he was able to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams, they do not know exactly how he comes to know those facts. Perhaps, Joseph’s ten years of servitude in Potiphar’s house and Joseph’s three years of imprisonment in Pharaoh’s prison may have given him the basis for the wisdom and discretion he is using now. As he has already experienced, the time they have to spend in the land of Goshen should be neither short nor easy. But as he may expect, they will be renewed as a great nation with a single identity, that is, Israel. Remarkably, it will be nearly five hundred years later that the Egyptians realise Joseph’s scheme (Ex. 12:40). Most likely, it may be recorded as the longest deception in Genesis.

Joseph’s brothers want to go back to Canaan, but they cannot, because Joseph’s steward declares that they have stolen the vizier’s cup (Gn. 44:4–6). Instead, they stubbornly refute his charges (Gn. 44:7–8). Then they make an oath so dangerous but confident:

¹⁰ Walton (2001:681) shows that “[d]ivination in Egypt was generally only accessible to people of high status.... The brothers would not be surprised that a high official uses such methods”. For this reason, Joseph’s brothers may not suspect the falsehood that Joseph is an Egyptian. Not only that, but even the Egyptians may be led to admit that he is becoming an Egyptian.

¹¹ Arnold (2009:362) indicates that “[t]he region of Goshen in the eastern Delta was later equated by the narrator with ‘the land of Rameses’ ([Gn.] 47:11). Its precise dimensions are impossible to trace, but it was said to provide better pasture for Jacob’s livestock than elsewhere in Egypt ([Gn.] 47:4–6)”. Along with its place, the name itself is also a mystery. Although it was the site where the descendants of Israel lived for nearly five hundred years, little is known about it.

אֲשֶׁר יִמְצָא אֶתְךָ מִעַבְדֵּךְ וְמִתְּגַם אֲנַחֲנוּ נָהִיה לְאָדָם לְעַבְדָּם

“With whomever of your servants it is found, he shall die, and we ourselves also shall be my lord’s slaves” (Gn. 44:9).

In effect, they cannot help but be confident because they have never actually stolen it. However, all of a sudden, the cup is found in Benjamin’s bag (Gn. 44:12). For them, the worst has happened. They tear their clothes as their father did formerly, reload their burdens from which they released themselves, and put them back on the donkey they laid down on their own, then go back to the place where they parted with Joseph (Gn. 44:11,13; cf. Gn. 37:34). Joseph knows all too well that they will come again, and he watches his brothers fall to the ground before him again (Gn. 44:14). The way they fall to the ground is different from how they previously bowed down to Joseph with courtesy. They are now criminals with their heads on the ground in the presence of Joseph. Joseph continues to intimidate and deceive his brothers (Gn. 44:15). But they cannot say anything to the vizier of Egypt. They suddenly become keepers of silence. However, there is an exception, and that is Judah. Judah confesses before the vizier that they are sinners, and he declares that they will all become the vizier’s slaves (Gn. 44:16). In the meantime, Mathews (2005:802) suggests that “[p]rove our innocence’ (*hith.* from *šādaq*) is not the first time that the word was in Judah’s mind (v. 16 [of ch. 44]). It is the same root word heard in his admission, ‘She [Tamar] is more righteous [*šādaq*] than I’ ([Gn.] 38:26)”. Previously, this confession from Judah gave Tamar a new life. But Joseph rejects Judah’s offer at once because all he needs now is one man, and that is Benjamin (Gn. 44:17).

It is interesting to take a closer look at how the steward finds the cup:

וַיַּחֲפֹשׁ בְּגָדוֹל הַחַל וּבְקָטָן כֹּלה וַיַּמְצָא הַגְּבִיעַ בְּאַמְקָה בְּנָמָן

“And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest, and the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack” (Gn. 44:12).

This verse reminds the reader of Laban’s search for his gods (Gn. 31:33–35). But the difference between the two is that in the previous case the gods of Laban were not found, but in this case, Joseph’s steward finds the cup in Benjamin’s sack. Rachel wisely sat on the teraphim and prevented them from being found by her father Laban. Unlike his mother, Benjamin does not even know it is in his sack. Another difference is the order in which they are searched. When Laban searched the teraphim, it was not clear exactly in what order he searched the tents of the suspects to find them (except for the order of Leah and Rachel’s tents [Gn. 31:33]). On the other hand, Joseph’s steward searches the sacks of the brothers, starting with exactly the oldest and reaching the youngest (cf. Gn. 43:33). Mathews (2005:800) is surprised to see that “[h]e does not tip off the plot by going directly to Benjamin’s bag but plays out the ruse in an Oscar-winning performance”! His acting is indeed good enough to fool them all. Here the difference between knowing and not knowing creates another difference.

Famous for his lengthy monologue in Genesis 44:18–34, Judah begins his speech with respectful permission from Joseph. For the moment, Arnold (1998:159) sees that “[t]he change appears to have begun with his declaration ‘she [Tamar] is more righteous than I’ ([Gn.] 38:26)”. To tell the truth, Judah is changed once by the deception of Tamar

and once again by the deception of Joseph. At the beginning of the speech:

וַיַּגַּשׁ אֶלְיוֹן הַוֹּהֶה וַיֹּאמֶר בְּיַדְךָ אֶלְיוֹן יְדַבֵּר־נָא עַבְדָךְ דָּבָר בְּאָזְנוֹי אֶלְיוֹן וְאֶל־יְהֹוָה אֲפָךְ בְּעַבְדָךְ כִּי כָּמוֹךְ
כְּפִרְעָה

“And Judah came near to him, and he said, ‘Oh my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord’s ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh himself’” (Gn. 44:18).

Judah’s politeness reminds the reader of the respectful expressions Abraham used to talk to the Lord when he was negotiating for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gn. 18:27,30–32). Just as Abraham dealt with the fear of God, so Judah is approaching him and speaking to him with the fear of Joseph. The peculiar thing about Judah’s words to Joseph is that he considers him to be dead (Gn. 44:20). Longman (2016:508) points out that “[o]f course, they did not know whether Joseph was still alive or not, but the public story was that he was killed by a wild animal, so they present Joseph as dead”. But in fact, a different locution was used for him before:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׁנַיִם עַשֶּׂר עֲבָדִים אֲחִים אֲנַחֲנוּ בְּנֵי אִישׁ־אֶחָד בָּאָרֶץ כְּנָעָן וְתָגֵה לְקַטֵּן אֶת־אָבִינוּ קִיּוֹם וְהַאֲחָد
אֲנִינוּ

“And they said, ‘We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the little one is with our father today, and the other is no more’” (Gn. 42:13).

Sailhamer (2008:302) argues that “[t]he meaning of the expression ‘he is no more’ (‘ēnennū) within Genesis does not imply that one is dead (cf. [Gn.] 42:36: ‘Simeon is no more’ [‘ēnennū]; Ge 5:24: ‘Enoch walked with God; then he was no more [‘ēnennū], because God took him away’)”. However, Jacob thought that Joseph was dead (Gn. 42:36). Thus, the locution “Simeon is no more” in Genesis 42:36 meant that Jacob believed he was dead. The same goes for Enoch: to say that God took him away meant that he had died in this world. Accordingly, the phrase “the other is no more” in Genesis 42:13 could have meant that he was dead. What the reader can see is that Judah’s words to Joseph now are more specific and direct than before. Probably, Judah is now speaking more openly about his thoughts to Joseph than before. Eventually, Judah speaks to the point where Joseph can no longer sustain his deception:

וְעַתָּה יְשַׁבֵּנָא עַבְדָךְ מִמֶּתֶן הַנֵּעֶר עַבְדָךְ לְאֶלְיוֹן וְהַנֵּעֶר יַעַל עַמְּ-אֲחִיו

“And now, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a slave to my lord, and let the boy go up with his brothers” (Gn. 44:33).

The reason Judah says this may be because he thinks of his father and is worried about him (Gn. 44:34). Indeed, what the reader has to remember as they watch the deception story is sincerity. Judah’s sincerity makes Joseph’s deception intolerable.

Conclusion

I have taken a closer look at the two events in which Joseph met his brothers in Egypt. And I have looked at how the story of Joseph’s deception is similar to and different from

other deceitful events in Genesis. I have also checked to some extent how Joseph's deceitful incident was opposed to the serpent's deceitful incident. Then what was the narrator trying to tell the reader through the long deception story (through the events of the two encounters of the brothers)? The most unique thing that can be seen in the deception case of Joseph is that he is solving the problems that were created through the deception cases through his deception. Joseph had to be enslaved in Egypt on account of the brothers' deception. Also, Joseph had to be imprisoned in Egypt on account of the Egyptian's deception. However, Joseph was able to forgive his brothers for his deception. Moreover, by his deception, Joseph was able to save many people from a great famine. If the first deception caused great suffering to the first people and their descendants through the deception, the last deception brought great salvation to so many people through the deception. Nevertheless, Joseph will not be able to escape the stigma of being a trickster. It seems, however, that Joseph wanted to save his people despite that stigma.

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