4.

Joseph's Change of Heart

Was Joseph entirely innocent in the events of that fateful day in Potiphar's house? We have already seen above (chapter 1) that the tendency of the earliest exegetes was to celebrate Joseph's virtue to almost superhuman proportions: he is "Joseph the Righteous" or "the Virtuous," and, according to *4 Maccabees* or *Jubilees* or *Wisdom of Solomon*, his resistance to the temptation and wiles of Mrs. Potiphar was unambiguous and altogether exemplary. As we heard Joseph recollect in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*,

> not even in my mind did I yield to her, for God loves more the one who is faithful in self-control in a dark cistern than the one who in royal chambers feasts on delicacies with excess. . . . For when I had been with her in her house, she would bare her arms and thighs so that I might lie with her. For she was wholly beautiful and splendidly decked out to entice me, but the Lord protected me from her manipulations.[1]

Joseph the Guilty

Yet we have likewise noted a certain tendency, specifically in our rabbinic sources, to fault Joseph on occasion. It was his tale-bearing that was responsible for the divine punishment that overtook him when he was sold as a slave down to Egypt, and it was his vanity, his dandy-like primping in Potiphar's house, that brought on the attentions of Mrs. Potiphar and, ultimately, her wrongful accusation and his imprisonment. It therefore ought not to be terribly surprising to find that, with regard to the events of that day in particular, Joseph was likewise found by rabbinic sources to be something other than entirely innocent. The following passage, from the Babylonian Talmud (*Soṭah* 36b), is a relatively late summary of some of the elements in this exegetical line. It takes as its point of departure Gen. 39:11, "And it came to pass on a certain day that he [Joseph] went to the house to do his work":

> R. Yoḥanan said: this [verse] teaches that the two of them [Joseph and Potiphar's wife] had planned to sin together. "He entered his house to *do his work*": Rab and Samuel [had disagreed on this phrase]: one said

> it really means to do his work, the other said it [is a euphemism that] means "to satisfy his desires." He entered; [and then it says] "And not one of the members of the household was present in the house." Is it really possible that no one else was present in the large house of this wicked man [Potiphar]? It was taught in the School of R. Ishma'el: that particular day was their festival, and they had all gone to their idolatrous rites, but she told them that she was sick. She had said [to herself] that there was no day in which she might indulge herself with Joseph like this day! [The biblical text continues:] "And she seized him by his garment . . ." At that moment the image of his father entered and appeared to him in the window. He said to him: Joseph, your brothers are destined to have their names written on the priestly breastplate, and yours is amongst theirs. Do you want it to be erased, and yourself to be called a shepherd of prostitutes, as it says [Prov. 29:3] "A shepherd of prostitutes loses [his] wealth"? At once "his bow remained in strength" [i.e., he overcame his desires].

This passage presents us with a somewhat different view of Joseph on that fateful day—or, rather, "views," since there are two quite distinct ones here. The first takes the text of Genesis 39 at, as it were, face value: Joseph is in all respects innocent and blameless. But the second, represented in our passage by R. Yoḥanan and one half of the Rab-Samuel dispute, sees Joseph as something of a willing participant, a man who has given in to temptation. Now one support for this approach is adduced from the biblical narrative itself; it is the innocent-looking phrase in "Joseph went to the house *to do his work*"—which, this second school of thought holds, is merely a euphemism for "to satisfy his desires."

That such a reading had enjoyed some popularity may be confirmed by a look at the Aramaic translation of Onkelos. For while Onkelos usually translates narrative texts rather closely, generally deviating only for doctrinal reasons, here he has veered sharply from the Hebrew original: instead of "to do his work," he has "to check his account books." One cannot but feel that this translator has gone out of his way to scotch what was already a very popular, but to his mind calumnious, reading of the phrase: instead of rendering it, and its vagaries, literally, he has substituted a more specific act that is safely beyond all possibility of double-entendre.

The second argument adduced against Joseph is one that we saw mentioned in passing above, in the "Assembly of Ladies." For the biblical text recounts that on this particular day there was no one in the house when Joseph came to "do his work." With, it seems, laudable historical imagination, the tradition (attributed here to the "school of R.

Ishma'el") finds this detail strange: in the household of such an important fellow as Potiphar, a high official in the court of Pharaoh, is it conceivable that no one from among the whole household staff of cooks, butlers, slaves, and retainers—no one was at home? The same tradition's answer is still more satisfactory. It was "their festival"—or, in another version, the "festival of the Nile"[2]—on that day, and everyone had departed to participate in the festivities. All except for Mrs. Potiphar: she feigns illness. She sees in the occurrence of this festival a one-time opportunity to have Joseph all to herself (since he, either because of his Hebrew birth or because of his crucial role in the running of the household, will in any case be at his job as usual); she can thus make one last all-out attempt upon his chastity. In fact her words, as supplied by the Babylonian Talmud, take advantage of a peculiarity in the Bible's wording here. For the verse in question (Gen. 39:11) begins *vayhi kehayyom hazzeh*—"And so it was that on a certain day [Joseph went to the house to do his work . . .]." While this is the sense of the opening phrase, it is to be noted that the somewhat anomalous particle *ke-* in *kehayyom hazzeh* must have been troubling to some postbiblical readers—as if the text literally meant something like "And so it was *like this day* that Joseph went to the house." Our exegete, in an elegant and precise handling of this anomaly, encloses it in mental quotation marks, and sees it as the end of sentence uttered, or thought, by Potiphar's wife: "I'll never have another opportunity *like this day*." The somewhat strange wording of the biblical text is thus being made out to be an allusion to this thought of hers, as if it were really saying "And so it was [that Mrs. Potiphar said] '. . . like this day,' and Joseph entered the house *to do his work*."[3]

In view of all this, Joseph's behavior takes on a somewhat different coloring: perhaps he knew perfectly well what he was doing when he approached the deserted house on Nile Day; perhaps he, no less than Mrs. Potiphar, was intent on "doing his work" there. It was not, according to our passage from the Babylonian Talmud, until after Mrs. Potiphar "seized his garment" that Joseph began to have second thoughts, thoughts that ultimately caused him to change his mind and flee. In that case, one must regard Joseph as, at least initially, a willing participant.

Joseph's Garment

Some exegetes even went beyond what is suggested here in searching for signs of Joseph's complicity. For there is the matter of the garment

itself that the fleeing Joseph leaves in her hand. To modern readers, the word "garment" might include all manner of expendables, from neckties to pocket handkerchiefs to vests or jackets, and Joseph's abandoning his garment therefore has less significance for us than it should. To an ancient exegete—not to speak of a biblical Israelite—the range of possibilities was narrower, and the resultant shame that would have been Joseph's, as well as the financial loss (unless the garment could be recovered), far greater. The Hebrew word here for "garment," *beged* (like the Aramaic *lebush*, which translates it in the targums), is a general term, capable of describing both an outer garment with closed seams that covered the whole body, or the tunic sometimes worn underneath it (though normally the latter was called *haluq*). It is clear that Joseph's becoming separated from his whole *beged* could not but arouse doubts in the minds of some exegetes: how could it have happened? Surely it was not simply that, in her passion, Mrs. Potiphar ripped the whole thing off in one deft sweep! And here the biblical text leaves a slight opportunity for Joseph's accusers. For the text reads: "And she seized him by his garment, saying 'Lie with me'; and he left the garment in her hand, and fled and went outside." These actions are sequential, but do not necessarily follow each other immediately. Hence, for example, the nuanced reading found in *Midrash Tanhuma:*

> R. Yehuda said: That day was the day of sacrificing to the Nile, and they all went out, and she alone was left, and he along with her, in the house. And she seized him by his garment, *and he went into bed with her.*[4]

Joseph willingly sheds his clothes. It is only afterwards—after (as we have seen in our passage from the Babylonian Talmud) Joseph has the vision of his father's "image" come to expostulate him—that he flees in haste, leaving (then!) his garment "in her hand." (According to another tradition, cited in *Genesis Rabba* in the name of R. Abbahu, so enamored of Joseph was the lady that she kept his garments—now in the plural, as they likewise appear in Targum Neophyti—and hugged and kissed them; this is an expansion of Gen. 39:16, "And she kept the garment with her.")

Moreover, there is a grammatical ambiguity connected with this "garment" that might further strengthen the case against Joseph. For the biblical text says that Mrs. Potiphar "seized him *bebigdo*." While this Hebrew word does mean "by his garment," it so happens that this same form can also mean: "in his betrayal." In fact, this is the very form of the word used in Exod. 21:8 to describe a man's conduct in selling a female slave or concubine who does not please him: he does so *be-*

bigdo bah, "in his dealing faithlessly with her." And so a careful exegete might conclude that by using this term *beged* (rather than, say, *simlah*, "clothing," used in connection with Joseph in Gen. 41:14), Scripture wished further to imply something about Joseph's own attitude at this crucial moment with Mrs. Potiphar. She seized him not only "by his garment" but "in his faithlessness," that is, Joseph was at that moment already prepared to betray his earlier moral stance and the profession of loyalty to his master Potiphar that he had made in Gen. 39:8–9.[5]

Taken together, these considerations seem finally to clinch the case against Joseph: not only is it true that he had something to do with stirring up Mrs. Potiphar's interest in the first place—primping and *becoming* "comely of form," etc. in Potiphar's house—but on the day in question he went to the house knowing full well what he was doing, he in fact went there "to do his work," and to that end voluntarily shed his garment, betraying, by this willing act, his master, his religious instruction, and his previous steadfastness. It was only afterwards that he changed his mind and fled.

If this picture of Joseph shows us less than the paragon of virtue seen in the earlier texts cited, it should not be adjudged inferior for all that. For, Joseph the Guilty not only helps out with the rabbinic problem, seen above, of justifying the ordeal of his lengthy imprisonment (that is, although Joseph was not, in terms of strict justice, guilty of adultery, his initial willingness and intention to sin may have been sufficient to warrant, within the divine plan, his suffering the punishment of imprisonment, all the more so if it enables him to emerge, at the end of his sufferings, as the thoroughly virtuous Joseph we know in the rest of the story). But apart from this, presenting Joseph as sorely tempted by Mrs. Potiphar, indeed, bringing him to the brink of submission, offered an advantage to exegetes intent on using the Joseph story (as so many biblical narratives were used) as a model of ethical conduct. For to hold that Joseph was not tempted for a minute by Mrs. Potiphar is, as it were, to put him outside of the range of normal human emotion. But to say, on the contrary, that Joseph was indeed tempted, and that events indeed brought him to the very point of complying—this is to present a Joseph of flesh and blood with whom others can identify, and whose example of sudden repentance others might seek to emulate.

Jacob's Teachings

It remains for us to inquire, however, into what it was that caused Joseph to change his mind in the heat of passion. And here, interestingly, one finds not one, but two broad lines of approach adopted by early exegetes. The first, and what might rightly be called the "rationalistic" approach, is to have Joseph suddenly remember the divine prohibition against adultery. That Joseph knew of such a prohibition seems to be clearly stated in the biblical text itself, for there, when Mrs. Potiphar first "sets her eye" on Joseph and makes her proposal of adultery, Joseph invokes this prohibition in his refusal:

> But he refused and he said to his master's wife: "Lo, having me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and everything that he has, he has given over to my charge; there is no one greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me, except for yourself, insofar as you are his wife. How then might **I do this great wrong and sin against God?**"
>
> (Gen. 39:8–9)

This is in all respects an interesting speech. Indeed, a reader fresh from the theme of Joseph's initial complicity might easily find in it the signs of a certain hesitation on the part of the young hero: "Well, perhaps . . . after all, I am not accountable to anyone else in the house, and besides, Potiphar did tell me that everything was given over to me . . . though he did, come to think of it, exclude you, since you are, after all, his wife—but besides, to do such a thing would be a terrible sin against God." But, the somewhat ambiguous tone aside, the passage in any case does give clear evidence that Joseph knows that compliance would be a "great wrong" and cause him to "sin against God."

The question is, *how* did he know? The revelation at Sinai, with its clear interdiction "Thou shalt not commit adultery," had yet to take place—so how could Joseph be so sure that adultery was a sin?[6] One answer already glimpsed above (chapter 1) is that he had received instruction to that effect from his father Jacob, who in turn had learned from Abraham: "And he [Joseph] did not surrender himself but remembered the Lord and the words which Jacob, his father, used to read, which were from the words of Abraham, that there is no man who [may] fornicate with a woman who has a husband [and] that there is a judgment of death which is decreed for him in heaven before the Lord Most High" (*Jubilees* 39:6). Similarly in the "Testament of Joseph": "But I recalled *my father's words*, went weeping into my quarters, and prayed to the Lord" (3:3).[7] And likewise the first-century romance *Joseph and Aseneth* observed (in explaining why Joseph had turned aside the gifts of silver and gold sent to him by the Egyptian ladies) that Joseph "always had the face of his father Jacob before his eyes, *and he remembered his father's commandments.*"

This same idea—that Jacob had instructed Joseph concerning the divine commandments—is also represented in some rabbinic texts, and here it is not infrequently combined with one or more of the midrashic motifs seen above. Thus, for example, the "son of his old age" motif has some obvious potential relevance: for if, as Targum Onkelos has it, Jacob loved Joseph most because he was a "wise son to him," then surely this must imply that Joseph had at one point acquired that which is "wisdom" *par excellence*, a knowledge of Torah. (The "anachronism" of the patriarchs and other early figures "studying Torah" is, as we shall see now, a rabbinic commonplace.)

But if so, how did Joseph come by his Torah education? A further hint is provided in a verse already investigated at length above, Gen. 37:2, "Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers." We saw earlier that the mention of Joseph's age, seventeen, seemed to conflict with his subsequent description in the same verse as a "boy." But beyond this, the very mention of his precise age seems somehow suspicious: for what purpose should Scripture be telling us exactly how old Joseph was at the time? And does not this verse's wording imply that, for some reason or other, Joseph had not been shepherding with his brothers before he was seventeen? If not, why not? An answer is presented in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*'s expansive translation of this verse: "Joseph, being seventeen years old *when he left the study-house* (*beit-midrash*)." In other words, unlike his brothers, Joseph, being the "wise son," had theretofore devoted himself to Torah study—in fact, he had done so in a rabbinic-style study-house—and it was only at the age of seventeen that he "graduated" and went (ever so briefly) into the family livestock business. A similar theme is found in *Genesis Rabba* (84:8) in connection with Jacob's loving Joseph "more than all his sons": "Said R. Nehemiah: Because all the *halakhot* that Shem and Eber had transmitted to Jacob, he transmitted to him [Joseph]." In this case, apparently Jacob too has had a Torah education, which he then passes on to his son.

But if so, then where did Jacob acquire this education? The mention of "Shem and Eber" is an allusion to the well known rabbinic tradition of a *beit-midrash* founded by these ancient figures (as well, occasionally, as others).[8] That Jacob was a student there can be derived in particular from the wording of Gen. 25:27, which contrasts him with his brother: "Now the boys grew up: and Esau became a man knowledgeable in hunting, a man of the field; but Jacob was a simple man, *dwelling in tents*." This last phrase in particular seems to have suggested a preference for "book learning": here is how *Jubilees* reworks the same verse:

> And Jacob was a smooth and upright man, and Esau was fierce, a man of the field, and hairy, and Jacob dwelt in tents. And the youths grew, and Jacob learned to write; but Esau did not learn.
>
> (*Jub.* 19:13)

An anonymous remark in *Genesis Rabba* elaborates on the same theme: " 'A simple man dwelling in tents'—two tents, the study-house of Shem and the study-house of Eber." Apparently here the anomalous plural "tents" was the initial focus of this midrashic tradition. For if the text had intended merely to contrast Esau, the "man of the field," with Jacob the homebody, "dwelling in *his* [or "the"] *tent*" would have been more appropriate—for certainly one does not inhabit more than one tent at a time. Unless . . . unless one of the "tents" in question was really a study-house. Apparently this basic idea eventually underwent modification, for in the above-cited text the plural form, "tents," is taken to indicate that Joseph (as was not uncommon in rabbinic times) had in fact studied with two masters, here Shem and Eber (separately).[9] In any case, it is to be observed that this particular motif is entangled with numerous others of the same basic *Tendenz*, for it was, as noted, a rabbinic commonplace to project back to the time of the patriarchs the practice of the Torah's commandments in general[10] and the commandment to study Torah in particular. Two other textual foci for this effort (that is, beside the "two tents" inhabited by Jacob) were the earlier mention of Rebecca's going to "seek the Lord" in Gen. 25:22,[11] and the observation that Abraham, "kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my teachings" (Gen. 26:5).[12] In addition, there were two verses that specifically used the term "tent" in such a way as to imply "study-house," Gen 9:27 ("May God enlarge Japhet, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem")[13] and Deut. 33:18 ("Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out, and Issachar in your tents").[14] All of these certainly reinforced the understanding that Jacob's "dwelling in tents" was really a reference to his study of Torah, and this in turn could only suggest that Jacob had passed on his learning to his "wise son" Joseph.

In fact, there are grounds for believing that Joseph in turn tried to teach his brothers what he had learned from his father. For back in Gen. 37:2, when it says that Joseph was "shepherding with his brothers," the word used for "with" (*'et*) can also be read as a sign of the direct object, that is, Joseph was "shepherding his brothers." How so? "He would hear a *halakhah* from his father and then go and teach it to his brothers."[15]

"Jacob Saw the Wagons . . ."

One last (and relatively late) entry into this theme concerns a verse that appears later on in the story of Joseph. For it is recounted that after Joseph has revealed himself to his brothers, he sends them back to Canaan to tell Jacob that Joseph is still alive, indeed, has risen to a position of prominence in Egypt, and commissions them to bring Jacob along with their own families back down to Egypt. To this end Joseph sends a convoy of wagons with them on the journey. The text then continues:

> So they went up out of Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. And they told him, "Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt." And his heart fainted, for he did not believe them. But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived, and Israel said, "It is enough, Joseph my son is still alive; I will go and see him before I die."
>
> (Gen. 45:25–28)

The meaning of the text seems clear enough: the news brought to Jacob was so fantastic that at first he dared not credit it. But as he heard his sons go over Joseph's story in detail, and especially seeing the multitude of wagons they had brought with them, he realized that his sons were indeed telling the truth. Yet one might well inquire: what was it about *seeing the wagons* that caused Jacob to change his mind? After all, if his sons were indeed intent on deceiving him once again about Joseph, how difficult would it be for them to secure a few wagons—or even a great many—to accomplish that deception?

In addition to this, there is a slight problem in the biblical text with regard to *who* actually was responsible for sending the wagons. The passage cited above says "the wagons *which Joseph had sent*." A little earlier in the story, however, it is Pharaoh who commands Joseph concerning the wagons, "Take for yourselves some wagons from the land of Egypt . . ." (Gen. 45:19), and later, after Jacob has been convinced that Joseph is indeed still alive, the biblical text specifically says that Jacob and his sons departed for Egypt "in the wagons which *Pharaoh* had sent to carry him" (Gen. 46:5). What then could be meant by our passage's referring to "the wagons which Joseph had sent"? One answer, presented in *Genesis Rabba*, is that in fact there were *two* sets of wagons: "Those wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him had idolatrous images engraved on them, so Judah burned them . . ." (94:3). But this is hardly a satisfactory solution, since we have just seen

that the reference to riding in Pharaoh's wagons in Gen. 46:5 comes chronologically *after* the reference to Joseph's wagons in Gen. 45:19: if Judah burned Pharaoh's wagons and these were replaced with Joseph's, why should the text later say that Jacob departed "in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him"?

A far cleverer solution is found in an adjacent remark in *Genesis Rabba:*

> R. Levi, in the name of R. Yoḥanan b. Sha'ulah [said]: [Joseph] said to them, If he [Jacob] believes you [when you say I am still alive], well and good. But if not, then you say to him [on my behalf]: At the time when I left you, was I not studying the law of the heifer whose neck is broken (Deut. 21:1)? Hence it is said, "And he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent."

This remark turns on the fact that the word "wagons" in Hebrew (*'agalot*) happens to be a homonym for the word "heifers." The remark of R. Yoḥanan b. Sha'ulah[16] cited by R. Levi (a third generation Palestinian *'amora*) thus suggests that Gen. 45:19 in fact has nothing to do with wagons, but really means "And he [Jacob] 'saw' the *heifers* which Joseph had sent." ("Sent" here is understood as "sent word of," a common enough meaning in biblical Hebrew [Gen. 20:2, 31:4, 41:8, etc.], while "saw" is apparently being interpreted in keeping with its rabbinic meaning of "consider" or even "approve of.") In other words, Joseph sends his brothers with a message to Jacob that he would immediately recognize as containing something that only the real Joseph could know: that the very last chapter in the Torah that Jacob and Joseph had been studying together before he was sold as slave was the law of the heifer in Deuteronomy 21. Thus, when Jacob hears this talk of "heifers" that Joseph had sent to him via the brothers, he knows for sure that they are telling the truth: he "saw [= considered] the [message of] 'heifers' that Joseph had sent" and his spirit revived.

This understanding not only takes care of the apparent discrepency with regard to who sent the wagons, but it also fits rather nicely into the immediate context. For the biblical verse in question reads: "But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived." One might have wondered why the "words of Joseph" and the wagons are spoken of together here, as if being of the same order; but according to R. Yoḥanan b. Sha'ulah's explanation, they are indeed of the same order. For the brothers tell Jacob "*all* the words of Joseph, which he had said to them" (that is, not only that he is still alive, but the proof thereof, the words about heifers)

"and Jacob considered the [message about] heifers that Joseph had sent" and knew that Joseph truly was alive.[17]

But why had Jacob and Joseph been studying the law of the heifer in Deuteronomy 21? Perhaps this is simply where they happened to be in their studies at the time. Yet inherent, it seems, in R. Yoḥanan b. Sha'ulah's choice of the law of the heifer—for he could have claimed that Jacob and Joseph had been studying the wagons of the tabernacle, or even the sin of the golden calf[18]—was a connection between that law and the fact of Joseph's departure. This connection, if it was present from the start, only found written expression in later writings, and ultimately came to be popularized in Rashi's Torah commentary. But in order to understand it, we must first turn to the law of the heifer itself:

> If in the land which the Lord your God gives you to possess, anyone is found slain, lying in the open country, and it is not known who killed him, then . . . the elders of the city which is nearest to the slain man shall take a heifer which has never been worked and which has not pulled in the yoke. And the elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with running water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley. . . . And all the elders of the city nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley, and they shall testify, "Our hands have not shed this blood, neither did our eyes see it shed. Forgive, O Lord, your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, and do not set the guilt of innocent blood in the midst of your people Israel."
>
> (Deut. 21:1–8)

The rites prescribed in this law are apparently intended to atone collectively for a murder whose perpetrator and cause are unknown, and presumably the statement of the elders, "Our hands have not shed this blood," is being uttered by them on behalf of all the inhabitants of the town. But to a rabbinic expositor, the fact that the elders are required to say, in their own name, as it were, "Our hands have not shed this blood," must have seemed a bit extreme—after all, would anyone expect these most venerable and honored community figures of being murderers? And so their statement was interpreted not as a denial of guilt with regard to the murder, but as an affirmation that they themselves had exercised all the duties owed to a traveler coming into their territory: "It did not happen that he came to us and we let him depart without food, nor did we see him and let him continue without accompanying him on the road."[19] Such is the true meaning of "Our hands have not shed this blood . . ."—we properly offered hospitality and escort. But if so, then the whole law of the heifer in Deuteronomy

21 can actually be read as a prescription of the duties owed to a traveler, any traveler—namely, he must be offered food and must be *accompanied* on his way. Therefore, it was hardly a coincidence that this law was the very last thing that Jacob and Joseph had been studying together on the day that Joseph left his father's house to rejoin his brothers at the herds. It all happened, a *Tanḥuma* text explains, in the following manner:

> When [Joseph] departed from him, they were occupied with studying the law of the heifer, for it is said, "And he sent him off from the valley of Hebron" (Gen. 37:14). But is not Hebron in the mountains, as it is said, "And they *went up* to the Negeb, and came to Hebron" [Num. 13:22]? This demonstrates that Hebron is in the mountains. But [the phrase "valley of Hebron"] is to be understood as implying that Jacob *accompanied* him from the mountains down to the valley, and the expression "And he sent him off . . ." means "and he accompanied him." Thereupon Joseph asked him concerning the divine commandment of accompanying a traveler, and he [Jacob] told him of the law of the heifer, whereby they [the elders of the city] say ["Our hands have not shed this blood," meaning:] "We did not take leave of him without accompanying him."[20]

In other words, Jacob himself was busily fulfilling the duties owed to a traveler—in this case, his own son Joseph: he accompanied him all the way from the mountains in which Hebron sits to the lowland, and on his way he explained to his son that he was going to this trouble in keeping with the provisions of the law of the heifer, which he then outlined. Thus, many years later, when Joseph finally sends word back to his father that he is still alive, he instructs his brothers to mention the *'agalot*, the "heifers," as a way of reminding Jacob of the last conversation the two had had on their way down from the mountains. "And when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he *considered the heifers* which Joseph had 'sent' . . ., the spirit of their father Jacob revived."

Here then is another proof that Jacob had instructed Joseph in divine law, indeed, in the Torah-that-was-yet-to-be-given. If so, he certainly had also instructed him concerning the injunction of the Decalogue, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," and it is to this teaching that Joseph alludes when he tells Mrs. Potiphar that what she proposes would cause him to "sin against God." And, quite reasonably, it is this same precept not to commit adultery that came into his mind on that fateful day in Potiphar's house: Joseph suddenly remembers "his father's teachings" and flees.

His Father's Countenance

In the passage from the Babylonian Talmud with which we began, however, a different explanation is presented for Joseph's change of heart. For there it was said:

> "And she seized him by his garment . . ." At that moment the image of his father entered and appeared to him in the window. He said to him: Joseph, your brothers are destined to have their names written on the priestly breastplate, and yours is amongst theirs. Do you want it to be erased, and yourself to be called a shepherd of prostitutes, as it says [Prov. 29:3] "A shepherd of prostitutes loses [his] wealth"? At once "his bow remained in strength" [Gen. 49:24, that is, he overcame his desires].

Here it is not the memory of Jacob's *teachings*, but a vision of Jacob himself that brings about Joseph's sudden repentance.[21] Now the speech that Jacob makes at this crucial moment, in the version of the Babylonian Talmud, concerns a verse in the biblical book of Proverbs. That verse, only cited partially above, reads in full: "A wisdom-loving man will please his father, but a shepherd of prostitutes loses [his] wealth." In a manner typical of the rabbinic use of citations from books like Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, the text here goes out of its way to identify the subject of this general maxim (that is, "the wisdom-loving man") with a specific figure from the Pentateuch, in this case, Joseph. And it is a good fit: Not only is Joseph (as we have seen) a "wisdom-loving man" in the story, but, given the scenario of his father's sudden visionary appearance, it is quite appropriate for Jacob to call his son back to his senses by citing a verse from Proverbs that says, in effect, "Do the right thing and you'll please your father." But more than this, the second half of the verse seems especially appropriate. After all, Mrs. Potiphar has, by her base proposal, "Lie with me!", announced herself to be a woman of meager virtue. And so, our midrashist feels, "a shepherd of prostitutes" is not too exaggerated a description of what Joseph will become if he submits to her proposal: instead, says Jacob, let the "wisdom-loving man" please his father and thus not become a "shepherd of prostitutes." But what of the whole expression, "a shepherd of prostitutes will lose his wealth"? The word "wealth" here might have suggested to another midrashist some scenario whereby Jacob would threaten to cut Joseph out of his will if he succumbs, saying, "A shepherd of prostitutes will lose his wealth." But *our* midrashist had a better idea, one that was both more biblical and more concrete: he has Jacob talk instead of the priestly breastplate (Exod. 28:15–21), which is to contain twelve precious stones corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel (= Jacob's sons). If you become a "shepherd of prostitutes," says Jacob, then you will have to be excluded from those who get precious stones assigned to them on the breastplate—you will "lose wealth," that is, lose your precious stone. This speech is enough to bring Joseph to his senses, and, according to our passage, he resists Mrs. Potiphar's temptation.

All this seems perfectly natural. But in fact the whole connection with the priestly breastplate did not originate with our midrashist contemplating a verse from Proverbs. On the contrary, the "shepherd of prostitutes" motif was tacked on to the original starting-point of this line of exegesis. That starting-point does not get mentioned until a little later on in the Babylonian Talmud: it is a cryptic line—another one!—from Jacob's blessing of Joseph in Genesis 49 (whose words "the daughters climbed the wall," etc. were discussed above, chapter 3). Here, the line in question reads: "At the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, from there the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel" (Gen. 49:24). This verse is what the whole "breastplate" motif presented in the Talmud was originally created to explain, as becomes clear in the continuation of our passage from the Babylonian Talmud:

> "At the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob"—Who was it that caused him [Joseph] to be inscribed on the priestly breastplate? The mighty one, Jacob. "From there the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel"—from there [that is, "because of that"] he was found worthy and was made a "shepherd" [of the rock of Israel].[22]

Let us try to understand these words. The phrase "the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel" in Gen. 49:24 certainly seems, at first glance, to be a reference to God. But as such its meaning in the larger context is somewhat obscure, to say the least. And so, forced to cast about for a different approach, our midrashist thinks: "Rock [or, more correctly, "stone"] of Israel" might be transformed from a metaphorical to an actual stone. But what actual stone could be meant? "Israel" of course is Jacob's other name (Gen. 32:29), and so the idea eventually might suggest itself that a "rock of Israel" might in fact be one of the twelve "rocks" of the priestly breastplate that represent the twelve tribes descended from Jacob. If so, the "shepherd *of a* rock of Israel" (an equally possible way of reading these Hebrew words in the Bible) might refer to someone who has his own stone on the priestly breastplate. Then the whole phrase, "from there, the shepherd of the rock of Israel" could be understood to mean "thanks to that, he [Joseph] became the shepherd [possessor] of a rock of Israel." But thanks to what? The whole line was: "At the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, from there the

Shepherd, the Rock of Israel." Now if "the Mighty One of Jacob" (another apparent reference to God) is distorted into "the mighty one, Jacob" (again, this is a defensible reading of the Hebrew), then the picture is complete: Joseph loses his desire (i.e., "his bow remains in strength")[23] thanks to the miraculous apparition of his father Jacob. And if all this thus happens "at the hands of the mighty one, Jacob" then "from there," thence, as a result of his father's apparition, Joseph does indeed retain his precious stone on the breastplate and becomes "the shepherd of a rock of Israel."

The basic stages of development of our whole passage from the Babylonian Talmud should thus be clear. After having cited sources suggesting that Joseph had knowingly gone to Potiphar's house on Nile Day in order to "do his work," it then turned to some of the cryptic phrases found in Gen. 49:24, the "Blessing of Joseph," which it (and earlier exegetes) had interpreted as referring to Joseph's change of heart vis-à-vis Mrs. Potiphar. This verse's first clause, "his bow remained in strength," was read a statement of the cooling of Joseph's desires, just as the following clause, "his arms were made agile" was similarly found to relate Joseph's abstinence.[24] But if so, then what is one to make of the rest of the verse, "at the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, from there the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel"? The Babylonian Talmud, as we have just seen, understood "from there" as "as a result of which"—presumably a reference to something Jacob had done in the previous clause—and then went on to take "Rock of Israel" as a reference to the priestly breastplate. Hence: as a result of Jacob's doings, Joseph became the "shepherd of a rock of Israel." It was only after these basic lines of approach had been established (for they appear in other texts as well)[25] that the author of our Talmudic text came up with his unique contribution, the happy connection between that verse and the one in Proverbs 29:3, "A wisdom-loving man will please his father, but a shepherd of prostitutes loses [his] wealth." The common term, "shepherd," suggested to him creating an exegesis that would contrast "shepherd of prostitutes" with "shepherd of the rock of Israel," and he elaborated this contrast in the form of a speech put in the mouth of Jacob at the time of his miraculous appearance.[26]

Where Did It Come From?

In sum, we have seen that some of our oldest texts suggest that it was a sudden attack of memory that caused Joseph to change his mind—he "remembered his father's teachings"—while the passage just studied in

the Babylonian Talmud, along with other rabbinic and later texts[27]—including, interestingly, the Qur'an[28]—suggest that it was a vision of his father's countenance that brought about Joseph's volte-face. It seems likely that the former motif, "father's teachings," is the older: not only have we seen it attested in such ancient sources as *Jubilees* and the *Testaments*, but it has a certain obvious quality to it. After all, the biblical text tells us that Joseph changed his mind, and even has Joseph evoke in one speech the idea that adultery is a sin; it only remained to explain how he knew this, and the idea of Torah study *avant la lettre* came to the rescue. Joseph had learned of the prohibition of adultery from his father, and remembered his father's teachings at this crucial moment. Yet the second explanation, that it was a vision of Jacob's face that caused him to change his mind, is hardly a rabbinic invention. We saw it above in passing, in a sentence cited from the first-century *Joseph and Aseneth:* Joseph refused the gifts of silver and gold sent to him by the Egyptian ladies because he "always *had the face of his father Jacob before his eyes*, and he remembered his father's commandments." Here, in other words, in a document written around the turn of the era, are both our motifs, "Saw Father's Countenance" and "Remembered Father's Teachings," put forward in a single elegant sentence.

But where did the "father's countenance" idea come from? Here we may observe that while the passage cited from the Babylonian Talmud *asserted* that Joseph had seen a vision of his father's face, it did not give any textual justification for such a scenario. Of course, its reading of Gen. 49:24, to the effect that Joseph's change of mind came "at the hands of the mighty one, Jacob," certainly fits in with the notion that Jacob's face suddenly appeared to Joseph. But, as a matter of fact, there is nothing about this reading per se that would require the creation of the "father's countenance" motif. On the contrary, "at the hands of the mighty one, Jacob" might just as easily have been explained as "thanks to the *teachings* of his father Jacob"—without having to have recourse to any supernatural apparitions. In fact, this is precisely how Targum Pseudo-Jonathan does translate this phrase: "from the mighty teaching that he had received from Jacob." In other words, the "Remembered Father's Teachings" motif could adequately explain Joseph's change of heart, and could likewise work well with the "at the hands of the mighty Jacob" reading of Gen. 49:24 seen above. If so, why did the other motif, "Saw Father's Countenance," ever get started—and how?

One might be tempted to conclude that there simply is no textual "home" for this motif. After all, midrashic motifs sometimes acquire details that have no exegetical basis (such, for example, was the detail

of the "knives" held by the women of the court in the "Assembly of Ladies"). And in this case, it might also be that Joseph's "sudden attack of memory" was perceived by early exegetes to be insufficient from a psychological standpoint, and so they—someone—simply invented the "father's face" apparition, and the motif caught on. Moreover, exegetes might have been troubled by another detail with regard to the "Remembered Father's Teachings" motif: For if Joseph had said to Mrs. Potiphar from the very beginning of her advances that he could not "sin again God," then clearly he was already aware of his father's teachings; how then could he suddenly "remember" them afresh on that fateful day and change his mind *in extremis*? From this standpoint too, a sudden appearance of Jacob's face would be far more satisfying.

And yet, there are certain hints in the material seen that the "Saw Father's Countenance" motif is indeed rooted in the reading of a particular biblical text. One of these is the fact that various rabbinic sources which connect Joseph's change of heart with the vision of his father's face do indeed accompany this motif with a specific biblical citation, namely, "by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob" (Gen. 49:24). Thus, for example, *Genesis Rabba ad loc.*: " 'By the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob': R. Huna in the name of R. Matna said: he saw the countenance of his father (*'iqonin shel 'abiv*) and his desire departed." Similarly, Talmud Yerushalmi *Horayot* 2: "R. Huna in the name of R. Matna: he stared intently and saw the countenance of our father (*'iqonin shel 'abinu*) and thereupon cooled his passion, 'at the hands of the mighty one, Jacob.' " Now it might be that this biblical text is simply being adduced to show that Jacob had *something to do* with Joseph's change of heart, that is, it all happened "at the hands of the mighty one, Jacob." Yet the fact that this verse so consistently accompanies specifically the "father's countenance" motif—indeed, the fact that, in *Genesis Rabba* and elsewhere, this verse is explained as *meaning* that Jacob's face appeared—certainly seems suggestive.

Yet what is there in this phrase that could have suggested that Jacob's *face* appeared to his son Joseph in Potiphar's house? Now of course it is possible that, in citing the first part of this verse, our rabbinic texts wished to allude as well to what follows it (a common enough practice), *viz.* "from there the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel." But this hardly clarifies things. For what is there in *any* of these words that might give rise to our motif? But here it is certainly relevant to note another interesting point in the tradition: our rabbinic sources do not speak literally of Jacob's "face" appearing—that is, the word *panim* ("face") is not used, nor yet *demut*, "likeness"—but two Greek loan-

words in Mishnaic Hebrew which are ultimately of the same origin, *'iqonin shel 'abiv* or *dioqano shel 'abiv*, the "countenance" or "portrait" of his father—both derived from the Greek εἰκών, "image" or "likeness" (often, specifically, an artist's rendering, a portrait or bust). This is the same word for "countenance" that was seen above in the "son of his old age" motif with regard to both Joseph and Isaac. But here there is no exegetical necessity to use this somewhat out-of-the-way term: here there is no word-play based on "splendor of countenance" (*ziv 'iqonin* = *zequnim*). And this fact too should ultimately help us to understand the origins of this tradition.

For in fact underlying this whole motif is a very primitive reading of "from there the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel"—one that, for good reason, is no longer remembered even by the exegetes cited. This reading takes the phrase "rock of Israel" just as it took the phrase "the mighty one of Jacob," not as an oblique reference to God, but as something having to do with Jacob himself, Jacob-who-is-called-Israel. But if so, then what might Jacob's "rock" or "stone" actually be? Apparently this word suggested a stone image or bust—an εἰκών—of the man Jacob/Israel who is Joseph's father. In other words, *'iqonin shel 'abiv* is nothing more than a "translation" of the biblical phrase *'eben yisra'el*, the "rock" or "stone" of Israel.[29] Likewise, it seems that *ro'eh* ("shepherd," written with the letter *'ayin*) here is being purposely confused with its near-homonym *ro'eh* (written with an *'aleph*), the latter meaning "he sees" or (repointing it) "he saw." (Again, there is ample evidence that the sounds of *'aleph* and *'ayin* were easily confused in late- and postbiblical Hebrew.)[30] It is interesting in this connection to observe that in one of the early manuscript families of the Samaritan targum,[31] the phrase "from there the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel" is rendered as "from there *appeared* [*'ithazzei* or *mithazzei*] the stone of Israel." In other words, *ro'eh*, "shepherd," is clearly being understood here as *ra'ah*, "he saw," hence, "there appeared."[32] Moreover, with regard to the connection of *'eben* with *'iqonin*, there is another piece of supporting evidence, namely, the anonymous explanation of Isaiah 31:9 that appears in *Midrash Tehillim* (*ad* Ps. 15:1). The Isaiah verse reads, "His rock (*sal'o*) will pass away in terror." These words are explained as follows: "His rock—this refers to his image (*'iqonya*)." It seems that here as well the presence of a rock/stone in the biblical text suggested the connection with a stone image, *'iqonin*. And so it seems that the entire verse Gen. 49:24 was understood as meaning that Joseph's passions had cooled "at the hands of the mighty one, Jacob, because[33] he [Joseph] had **seen** the **'stone'** [*'iqonin* = "bust," "image"] of Israel."

It was noted in passing above that one rabbinic source still preserves the "Remembered Father's Teachings" motif found otherwise in *Jubilees*, the *Testaments*, and other prerabbinic sources, and that is the translation of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, which renders "at the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob" as "from the mighty *instruction* that he had received from Jacob." If so, it now seems possible that the two motifs that we have been tracing, "Remembered Father's Teachings" and "Saw Father's Countenance," are not rival motifs that sprang up independently, but twin halves of a running exegesis of Gen. 49:24. For, having established that this whole section of Jacob's blessing of his son Joseph is a reference to his resistance to the temptations of Mrs. Potiphar, the exegete proceeds to understand the end of v. 24 as setting forth *how* it happened that Joseph was able to resist. His refusal was brought about "at the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob"—that is, thanks to Jacob's teachings, the "mighty instruction" referred to in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan—and these teachings suddenly came to mind at the crucial moment "from there the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel," that is, because Joseph, sorely tempted, suddenly "saw his father's face and lost his desire."

This midrash, if I have correctly restored it, appears in its combined form in only one place, the passing remark of *Joseph and Aseneth* that Joseph had been able to resist temptation because he "always had the face of his father Jacob before his eyes, and he remembered his father's commandments." Elsewhere the two motifs are presented as alternative explanations, "Remembered Father's Teachings" surviving in *Jubilees*, etc., "Saw Father's Countenance" in the various rabbinic sources seen. And in these latter, as we have likewise seen, the connection between "stone" and *'iqonin* was eventually lost, though the idea that Gen. 49:24 was somehow connected to a vision of Jacob's face stayed on. How natural, then, that this idea of Jacob's miraculous appearance should come to be attached to the *name* of Jacob in the first half of the verse (as it was in the Jerusalem Talmud, *Genesis Rabba*, and elsewhere) freeing up the "stone of Israel" for a far more creative midrash, that of the precious stones on the breastplate.

Jacob's Portrait on the Heavenly Throne

And yet, having come this far, we still have not traced all the elements that went into this "Saw Father's Countenance" motif. One more tradition is relevant here, for it too speaks of Jacob's "countenance" or "portrait." The tradition in question holds that Jacob's portrait is "engraved on the heavenly throne." This particular motif is widely distributed in rabbinic texts. Thus, for example, in *Numbers Rabba* (*Bemidbar*, 4:1) the verse from Isaiah 43:4, "Because you are precious in my eyes, you have been honored . . ." is explained: "God said to Jacob: Jacob, you are so precious in my eyes that I have, as it were, fixed your portrait (*'iqonin*) on the heavenly throne."[34] Similarly, one reads concerning the opening verse of chapter 2 of Lamentations: " 'How the Lord in his anger has beclouded . . .': Said God to Israel: Do you truly aggravate me? It is only the fact that the portrait (*'iqonin*) of Jacob is engraved on my throne. Here then, take it! And he threw it in their faces." And likewise in *Genesis Rabba* 78:3, on the verse "For you have wrestled with God and with men and have prevailed" (Gen. 32:28) we read: "You are the one whose portrait is engraved on high."

Any one of these might be adduced as *the* verse that gave rise to the motif in question. Thus, in the first case cited, the Isaiah verse reads in full: "Because you are precious in my eyes, you have been honored; and I have loved you, and I put men in your stead, and whole peoples in place of yourself." The phrase "I put men . . ." in Hebrew is really in the singular, "I put a man in your stead." Could this not have suggested that God had actually fashioned a "man," a figurine, of Jacob because he loved him so much, and placed that figurine on the heavenly throne, so that (citing the rest of the verse) "whole peoples [stand] underneath you[r image]"?[35] Similarly, the rest of the Lamentations verse reads: "He has cast down from heaven to earth the beauty of Israel." If the "beauty of Israel" is understood in concrete fashion, it might seem to refer to something of Jacob's, an actual object of beauty—hence, a beautiful portrait of Jacob. But if it was "cast down" from heaven, that must mean that it previously was there—and where might a portrait of Jacob have been but on the heavenly throne itself? Finally, the last example takes the Genesis verse "you have wrestled with God and men" as "you have exalted yourself with God and men."[36] But this might then imply that Jacob was in two places at once, both in Heaven with God and down on earth with men. But how could this be possible? It must have been that he was "exalted" in Heaven, as it were, by proxy, represented there by a statue or portrait of himself.

Yet the very fact that all of these work more or less well might suggest that none of them is at the origin of our tradition. And in fact a check of the rabbinic sources reveals that this particular motif, Jacob's portrait on the heavenly throne, is found most consistently associated not with any of the above texts, but with the description of Jacob's dream at Bethel. The biblical passage in question reads as follows:

> Jacob left Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place, and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it [or "him"] and said: "I am the Lord. . . ." Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it."
>
> (Gen. 28:12–16)

There are many interesting exegetical questions that were explored in this passage, but the relevant one here is one that, at first glance, might hardly have disturbed anyone: it is that the angels on the ladder are said to be "ascending and descending on it." Now certainly in Hebrew, as in English and many other languages, the order in which these two verbs usually come is a matter of convention: things generally go "up and down," not "down and up." So perhaps it was only in keeping with this linguistic convention that our biblical text said "ascending and descending" rather than the opposite. Yet angels are supposed generally to dwell in Heaven; should they not then have been more accurately described as "descending and [then, afterwards] ascending"?

A number of midrashic answers to this question were developed. One held that the angels who are said to visit Abraham (in Gen. 18:2–15) were subsequently not allowed back into Heaven,[37] and wandered about on earth until the time Jacob left his father's house to go to Laban's. The angels escorted him to Bethel, and then were permitted to ascend into Heaven on the ladder of Jacob's dream. So it was that these angels could first *ascend* on the ladder and then some other angels could *descend*, presumably for some further purpose (such as escorting Jacob the rest of the way). But another approach saw "ascending" and "descending" not as two individual acts, a single going-up followed by a single going-down, but as a series of repeated acts, that is, angels *kept* going up and down between Heaven and earth. But why? The texts says "ascending and descending *on it*." But the Hebrew word *bo* here can be translated not only as "on it," but also "on him" (that is, on Jacob) or even "because of him" or "for his sake."[38] And so we find the following:

> R. Ḥiyya the Great and R. Yannai [disagreed]: one said they went up and down [*bo*] on the ladder; the other said they went up and down [*bo*] for Jacob. . . . as it is said, "Israel, by you am I made glorious" (Isa. 49:3)—you are the one whose portrait is carved on high. They went up to see his portrait, then went down to see him sleeping.
>
> (*Genesis Rabba* 68:12)

According to this scenario, the angels are so taken with the righteous Jacob that they keep shuttling back and forth between Heaven and earth in order to see him, ascending *bo*, to see his heavenly portrait, and then descending *bo*, to see him in the flesh sleeping at the foot of the ladder. The text from Isaiah 49:3, "Israel, by you am I made glorious" is then adduced to further prove that Jacob's portrait is indeed located on high. For "to be made glorious" can also be understood as "to be made beautiful," hence, "to decorate." It is thus as if God were saying: Yes indeed, I have beautified my quarters up here *by you*, not of course literally by "you," but with your portrait.

It is interesting that there is even an echo of this midrash in the New Testament:

> Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."
>
> (John 1:50–51)

How can we know that this New Testament passage is part of the above midrashic tradition, and not simply an allusion to the mention of angels "ascending and descending" in Genesis? Because it says "angels of God ascending and descending *upon the Son of man*." Clearly this belongs to the exegetical school represented by R. Yannai above, that is, the one that takes *bo* in the Genesis text to mean not "on the ladder" but "for Jacob." So here too, *bo* is being taken as referring to a person, namely, "upon the Son of man." (It is also worth noting that, although the Gospel of John was presumably composed in Greek, this particular play on words could not work in Greek, since the word for ladder in the Greek Bible is feminine [κλίμαξ] and the only alternative to "on it" would thus be "for her.")[39]

These two explanations concerning "ascending and descending" are found harmonized in the version of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan:

> And he dreamt that there was a ladder fixed in the earth and its head reached the Heavens, and the two angels who had gone to Sodom and had then been exiled from Heaven for having revealed secrets of the Master of the world and had thus been wandering about until Jacob left his father's house, whereupon they lovingly accompanied him to Bethel—now they ascended to the upper heavens and called out: Come and see the faithful Jacob, who portrait is fixed on the Glorious Throne, since you have desired to see him. Then the other holy angels of the Lord went down to see him.

Here the angels that had been exiled on earth go up, but it is not just a single going-up followed by a single going-down: they call to their fellow angels to go and catch a glimpse of Jacob, and this feeds into the "ascending and descending for [i.e., in order to see] him" motif.

In any case, the origin of Jacob's heavenly portrait thus seems solved: "ascending and descending *on it*" gave rise to the reading "ascending and descending [repeatedly] for [that is, in order to see] *him*," and that in turn necessitated devising a reason for the angels to go *up* to see Jacob as well as *down* to see him. So a Jacob-in-Heaven, a heavenly portrait of him, was created to solve the problem; now there was a celestial counterpart to the earthly man[40] asleep on the ground.

And yet, despite this explanation, one might still entertain some doubts about the motif's ultimate origins. After all, the whole starting point of this exegetical line had been the problem of the order of the verbs that has the angels (first) ascending and (then) descending. One line of argument, as we saw, accounted for this by saying that there were already some angels on the ground, and that these went up and others came down. Now an alternate approach (one that, for some reason, either did not know of the first one—perhaps it was not yet invented—or did not approve of it) sought to read "ascending and descending" as repeated actions, something the angels *kept doing*. If so, then there was no real problem with the order "ascending and descending"—as rabbinic exegetes might observe, *lav davqa hu'*, the text did not mean specifically *first* ascending and *then* descending, it simply meant they kept going up and down. But if the problem of the order of the verbs is thereby solved, one still needs to explain *why* these angels kept going up and down. Now the "down" part was easy enough: they went down to see Jacob. *But if so, then the "up" part could have been solved in any number of other ways.* The angels could have been said to go down to see Jacob, and then go up to sing his praises before God on high, then go down again to catch another glimpse of him, and so forth. Or indeed, they might have been said to go down, see Jacob, and then ascend again to tell their fellow-angels, then escort the new ones down with them, and so on in greater and greater and greater throngs—indeed, this might be done in almost the same language as that seen above in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: "Now they ascended to the upper heavens and called out: Come and see the faithful Jacob . . . since you have desired to see him. Then [they with] the other holy angels of the Lord went down to see him."

In other words, when one considers it, the whole idea of a heavenly portrait need not have been created in response to the "ascending and descending" problem—there were indeed far less taxing ways to solve it. And if it be objected—correctly—that midrash is not strictly and exclusively a matter of solving "problems" (even broadly conceived) in the biblical text, that it also frequently represents an attempt to connect ideological or historical or other concerns with the Bible, or simply, as perhaps in this case, to hang a pleasing idea on a biblical "peg," one must nevertheless ask: why *this* "peg"? We saw at the beginning of our exposition how well suited Isa. 43:4, "I put a man in your stead," or Lam. 2:1, "He has cast down . . . the beauty of Israel," or even Gen. 32:28, "You have exalted yourself with God and with men" were with respect to the motif of Jacob's heavenly portrait, or even how appropriately Isa. 49:3, "Israel, by you am I beautified," could be adduced for it in *Genesis Rabba*. If this idea needed a home, any of these verses would have provided a more comfortable one than "ascending and descending" does. (Equally appropriate might have been Ezekiel's mention of the "face of a man" in his description of the heavenly host, Ezek. 1:10, 26, a connection indeed suggested in later texts.) And yet, as noted, our rabbinic sources, especially the oldest ones, agree in connecting this motif specifically with Jacob's dream.

Such misgivings only become stronger when one turns to another ancient source in which something related to our motif, "Jacob's Portrait on the Heavenly Throne," seems to be present. The source in question is a somewhat out-of-the-way one, a brief pseudepigraphon known as "The Ladder" or "The Ladder of Jacob."[41] The period of this text's original composition is unknown: there is no reason to date it later than the first century C.E., but it might conceivably go back even before the common era. In style and in some of its details, it resembles some relatively early works. It survives only in various Slavonic versions,[42] but clearly these are based on an earlier Greek text; that text, in turn, might well have been translated from a Hebrew or Aramaic original, for the Jewish character of the underlying text is apparent. Elsewhere it might be of value to treat this text as a whole, but here we are interested only in its opening few sentences. These read as follows:

> Jacob then went to Laban his uncle. He found a place and, laying his head on a stone, he slept there, for the sun had gone down. He had a dream. And behold, a ladder was fixed on the earth, whose top reached to heaven. And the top of the ladder was the face of a man, carved out of fire. There were twelve steps leading to the top of the ladder, and on each step to the top there were human faces, on the right and on the left, twenty-four faces [or busts] including their chests. And the face in the middle was higher than all that I saw, the

> one of fire, including the shoulders and arms, exceedingly terrifying, more than those twenty-four faces. And while I was still looking at it, behold, angels of God ascended and descended on it. And God was standing above its highest face, and he called to me from there, saying "Jacob, Jacob!" And I said, "Here I am, Lord."

I cannot claim to understand all of this strange text. The twenty-four faces are later on identified as the "kings of the ungodly nations of this age," the ladder itself thus representing "this age" and its "periods" (5:2–4). But the great, fiery "face of a man" at the top of the ladder is not identified in this text, and we are only left to speculate how it may be related to the heavenly portrait in our midrash. One brief remark above, however, is striking for our overall inquiry. For we read: "And behold, a ladder was fixed on the earth, whose top reached to heaven. *And the top of the ladder was the face of a man,* carved out of fire." Now anyone who knows the Hebrew text of Gen. 28:12 will immediately recognize the source of this image. For though the Bible says that in his dream Jacob saw a ladder whose *top* reached to the Heavens, the word for "top" in Hebrew, *rosh,* is the same word normally used for "head." And so our Slavonic text—or, rather, the Hebrew text that underlies it—apparently takes the biblical reference to the ladder's "head" as a suggestion that the ladder indeed *had* a head, a man's head, at its very top. The fact, then, of this biblical text's wording—"a ladder set up on the earth, *and its head* reached to heaven"—engendered the heavenly "head" in our pseudepigraphon.

But let us consider the entire sentence in the Bible: "And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and its 'head' reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it." We saw above that the inanimate *bo* of "ascending and descending *on it*" was midrashically transformed into an animate *him,* "ascending and descending *for him*" (or, in John 1, "upon him"). But what if the *its* of "its head" were similarly transformed from inanimate to animate? Why then we would have: "And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth. And *his* [Jacob's] head reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending upon him." Here, it seems, is the full origin of our midrash. For Jacob's "head" somehow reaches, via the ladder, to the Heavens—either, as in the pseudepigraphon, an image of his head stands at the top of the ladder, or perhaps such an image ascends via the ladder into Heaven—and the angels can thus go up and down between Jacob's heavenly head and his earthly one, presumably to admire both. In any case, one can easily see how this transformation of the ladder's "head" to a human head (already witnessed in the pseudepigraphon) could lead directly to the notion that some sort of bust, an *'iqonin,* of Jacob existed on high.[43]

In this connection, one cannot but be struck by a remark in Horace Lunt's valuable introduction to his recent translation of the "Ladder."[44] For there, in speculating about the original language of this text, he notes that the word used here to designate the great "head" on the ladder is somewhat unusual: "no other Slavonic text has *lice,* 'face,' used to mean 'statue' or 'bust' (1:5, etc.), and there is no Semitic parallel." But there is! It is that Greek loan-word into Mishnaic Hebrew, *'iqonin.* For as we have seen above, *'iqonin* did come to mean "face," as in *ziv 'iqonin,* "splendor-of-countenance" or "features"—and yet its basic meaning of "portrait" or "bust" is preserved in a number of rabbinic usages, including, prominently, the *'iqonin shel 'abiv* ("His Father's Countenance") motif studied above, where *'iqonin* was generated, as we have seen, by the biblical phrase "the stone of Israel" (hence, stone figure, bust). And so there is little doubt that our pseudepigraphon, in seeking to "translate" the biblical phrase "his/its head reached to Heaven," reworded it in Mishnaic Hebrew as "his [Jacob's] *'iqonin* reached Heaven," and this in turn gave rise to the presence of a Heavenly bust or portrait of Jacob on the divine throne.

And so we now have a fuller picture of the role of Jacob's *'iqonin* in rabbinic exegesis: it occurs in connection with Joseph's change of heart in Potiphar's house, and it occurs in connection with Jacob's dream at Bethel. We might then logically inquire whether in fact Jacob's *'iqonin* was imported from one of these motifs to the other, or whether it was generated spontaneously in both. While "spontaneous generation" is as unlikely a prospect in midrash as in biology, it seems at this point impossible to guess if the concept of Jacob's *'iqonin* originally migrated from Potiphar's house to Jacob's dream, or vice versa. We have already seen the likelihood that the former motif goes back at least as far as the first century B.C.E., and this is certainly an impressive pedigree. Yet the existence of something very much like the motif of Jacob's *'iqonin* in the "Ladder of Jacob" might suggest an equally ancient origin for it. And so this question must, for now, be left open.

One final point of a technical nature. We saw that, in the rabbinic versions of "Saw Father's Countenance," the biblical text cited to support it was "at the hands of the mighty one, Jacob," whereas the real source of this motif came a bit later in the same verse, "the stone of Israel." So similarly here, the biblical text cited to support the idea that Jacob's portrait was etched on the heavenly throne was the phrase

"ascending and descending for him," whereas in reality the textual basis came a little earlier in the same verse "his/its head reached to Heaven." Now this is not an uncommon phenomenon in the way midrashic motifs develop, and, if we wished to give a name to the process by which it occurs, we might do no better than to borrow a term from psychology and call it "**transfer of affects,**" the process whereby a particular motif, generated to explain or elaborate text A, comes to be understood as an explanation for some other verse, B.[45] We have already seen above that this process can lead to the phenomenon of "midrashic doublets," whereby the same motif comes to be used to comment upon two different biblical texts. But sometimes, as in the above two examples, the process of "transfer of affects" does not result in "doublets" at all. Instead, the motif becomes utterly detached from its original home, so that no one is any longer aware of what that home was, and a certain amount of detective work is then required in order to track down the motif's origins. Thus it seems that, in the two cases just studied above, the "transfer of affects" was hardly conscious: what happened with both "Saw Father's Countenance" and "Jacob's Portrait on the Heavenly Throne" was that the motifs truly began to be connected with phrases (respectively: "from the hands of the mighty one, Jacob" and "ascending and descending for him") that were *not* the original homes of the motifs, and so their true relationship to the biblical text was lost. Now in these two cases, the transfer did not go very far—it led from one phrase to another within the same verse; but sometimes, as we will see, the jump can be much greater.

Notes

1. "The Testament of Joseph" 9:2–5, in J. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:821.
2. See above, chapter 3, and J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck, *Genesis Rabba*, 1071–72, and notes.
3. Another answer to the problem of there being "no man in the house" is supplied in *Genesis Rabba:* "R. Samuel b. Nahman said: Certainly Joseph went 'to do his work,' but: 'there was no man in the house.' He checked, and did not find himself to be a man" (87:7). This in turn is connected with the reading of Gen. 49:24 as a metaphor for loss of sexual appetite.
4. *Tanhuma, "Vayyeshev,"* 9. The passage continues with the "no man in the house" motif (above, n. 3). *Aggadot ha-Talmud* has: "the two of them went naked into bed." See E. Z. Melamed *Halakhic Midrashim* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 478.
5. I owe this observation to Prof. M. Kossovsky of the Hebrew University. He further points out that the absence of an expected *dagesh* in the "d" of *bebigdo* in fact suggested to various commentators that this word is a by-form of *bebogdo* (unambiguously "in his betrayal"), in which the absence of the *dagesh* would be expected. See thus the discussion of *bebigdo* in Exod. 21:8 in b. *Qiddushin* 19 b, Rashi and Tosafot *ad loc.*, as well as the Pentateuch commentary of Ba'al ha-Turim *ad* Exod. 21:8.
6. To rabbinic expositors one possible answer was that the prohibition of adultery was among the seven universal laws communicated to the sons of Noah ("The Noahide Laws"). The author of *Jubilees* knew of a tradition of Noahide commandments (see *Jubilees* 7:20–25), but apparently felt the necessity of nevertheless asserting that the prohibition of adultery had been specifically communicated to Joseph by his father, one of the divine statutes written on the "Heavenly Tablets" (though this may simply represent the manner in which these Noahide commandments were communicated).
7. Philo of Alexandria seems to have a similar tradition, but for him the "pre-Sinaitic revelation" is apparently not an issue—he assumes that Joseph knew the Torah, for such is his answer to Mrs. Potiphar: "We children of the Hebrews follow laws and customs which are especially our own. Other nations are permitted after the fourteenth year to deal without interference with harlots and strumpets and all those who make a traffic of their bodies, but with us a courtesan is not even permitted to live, and death is the penalty appointed for women who ply this trade [apparently based on Deut. 23:17]. Before the lawful union we know no mating with other women. . . . To this day I have remained pure, and I will not take the first step in transgression by committing adultery, the greatest of crimes" ("On Joseph," 43–44). All this, incidentally, is part of an expansive version of Gen.39:8–9, which Philo has tranferred to the very day of Mrs. Potiphar's seizing Joseph's garment.
8. See Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 5:187 n. 51; 192 n. 63; 225 n. 102. On Shem, see also below.
9. Cf. *Midrash ha-Gadol* (Margoliot, p. 897): " 'Tent' is not said here but 'tents': [this teaches] that he studied in many study-houses, the study-house of Shem and the study-house of Eber and the study-house of Abraham."
10. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:92–93 n. 55; 235 n. 140; 259, n. 275.
11. Interpreted as meaning that Rebecca went to the study-house of Eber (or Shem): see Theodor-Albeck, *Genesis Rabba*, vol. 2, 684 and notes. Certainly the use of the verb "seek" (*darash*) suggested a connection with *midrash*, a nominal form of the same root; moreover, the fact that the text says that Rebecca *went* implies that this "seeking" of the Lord involved some human intermediary. It may also be that a woman was not to undertake such "seeking" directly: Josephus in his retelling of the biblical narrative states that it was *Isaac* who "consulted God" (*Jewish Antiquities* I 257).
12. This exhaustive catalogue of course implied that God had communicated a large number of divine laws to Abraham, a support for the basic motif "Patriarchs Kept the Commandments" (above, n. 7); moreover, the very profusion suggested that Abraham had to *study* these laws in order to master them. Beyond this, the plural "teachings" (*torotai*) suggested the rabbinic "two Torahs," the Oral and the Written. (Cf. Deut. 33:10 in rabbinic exegesis.)

13. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: "May the Lord beautify the border of Japhet and let his sons convert [to Judaism] and dwell in the study-house of Shem."
14. This theme has been treated by M. Beer, "Issachar and Zebulun" (Hebrew) *Bar Ilan Annual* 6 (1968): 167–80.
15. *Beit ha-Midrash*, vol. 6, 82. Cf. Babylonian Talmud, *Ta'anit* 10 b, *Genesis Rabba* 94:2. Also, Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:169 and 5:356.
16. Elsewhere: Yoḥanan b. Sha'ul, or b. She'ilah, or b. Shilah, a first-generation *'amora*, perhaps the brother of R. Yosi b. Sha'ul (see b. *Shabbat* 125 b).
17. An alternate approach would be to have the brothers explain to their father that the *'agalot* (wagons) outside are not only intended to carry Jacob and his belongings down to Egypt, but they are also an *allusion* to the last thing that Jacob and Joseph had studied together. This would better account for the wording "the wagons which Joseph had sent *to carry him*" and avoid having to interpret the last phrase as something like "to lift him up," that is, to revive his spirits. Yet another possibility was to read the *'agalot* here not as an allusion to the law of the heifer, but to the "wagons of the tabernacle" (Num. 7:6–8), or to the incident of the golden calf (*'egel*; Exod. 32). These were indeed proposed; see Theodor-Albeck, *Genesis Rabba*, 1173–74.
18. See above note.
19. See b. *Soṭa*, 38 b.
20. *Midrash Tanḥuma* ed. S. Buber (Vilna, 1899) "Introduction," 132. Oxford Ms. 183/187; number 156 on title page. See also Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:357.
21. The text says literally that Jacob's "countenance (*'iqonin*) entered and appeared to him in the window." Clearly, then, this is a visionary Jacob whose face suddenly appears, framed, as it were, by the window. But it may even be that the word "window" here (*ḥalon*) should be emended to "dream" (*ḥalom*); this is the reading to be found in *Midrash Sekhel Ṭob, ad loc.* and in *Aggadot ha-Talmud*.
22. b. *Soṭa* 36 b. The first part of this midrash is truncated in the Munich manuscript of the Babylonian Talmud. All versions then add the connection with the "shepherd" of Ps. 80:2. See below, note 26.
23. See above, note 3. *Eitan* here is being understood as "normal [or "prior"] condition" (cf. b. Niddah 48b), based on Exod. 14:27.
24. Explained in our Talmudic passage (not cited above) as: "He stuck his hands in the ground so that his lust came out from between his fingernails."
25. *Talmud Yerushalmi, Horayot* 2; *Genesis Rabba* 87:7, *Midrash Tanḥuma, Vayyesheb* 9; *Pirqei R. Eli'ezer*, chap. 39.
26. In fact a further play on "shepherd" is provided at the very end of our Talmudic passage (not cited above): "And so Joseph was made a shepherd, as it says, 'Shepherd of Israel, hearken, who leadest Joseph as a flock' " (Ps. 80:2). This exegesis is dependent on reading "Joseph" in the Psalm 80 not as the object but the subject of the verb, i.e., as if it said: "Shepherd of Israel, hearken, O Joseph who leadest [Israel] as a flock." Thus, because of his exemplary conduct, Joseph merited being called the "shepherd of Israel." Cf. *Pirqei R. Eli'ezer*, chap. 39.
27. See above, note 25.

28. Sura 12:24. The Qur'anic phrase, *burhana rabbihi*, "the appearance of his master [= Jacob]," has an interesting history of interpretation, having been associated by commentators either with a divine appearance ("master" = Lord) or a vision of Potiphar ("master" = Potiphar). Its connection with our midrash has been discussed by numerous scholars since Geiger; see M. Grünbaum, "Zu 'Jussuf und Suleicha' "in his *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Sprach- und Sagenkunde*, ed. F. Perles (Berlin: S. Calvary & Co., 1901), 515–51; I. Schapiro, *Die haggadischen Elemente im erzählende Teil des Korans* (Leipzig: Buchhandlung Gustav Fock, 1907), 40; D. Sidersky, *Les Origines des légendes musulmanes dans le Coran* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste P. Geuthner, 1933), 61. cf. J. Macdonald, "Joseph in the Qur'an and Muslim Commentary: A Comparative Study," *The Muslim World* 46 (1956):113–31 and 207–24.
29. That an *'iqonin* is in fact a *carved* likeness made out of stone or some other material may further be supported by that other midrashic tradition (discussed below) to the effect that Jacob's *'iqonin* was *ḥaquqah*, "engraved" or "carved," on the heavenly throne. See *Genesis Rabba* 78:3; *Lamentations Rabba ad* Lam. 2:1, etc. and below. Cf. Jerusalem Talmud *Abodah Zarah* 42 a-b.
30. The case of *'aleph* and *'ayin* is somewhat different from that of other gutterals, whose distinctiveness was, as Kutscher implies, better preserved. For *'aleph* and *'ayin*, the early confusion of these two sounds is frequently reflected in the ancient versions and early commentaries on such verses as Gen. 3:21 (cf. E. Tov, *Text Critical Use of the Septuagint* [Jerusalem: Simor, 1981], 201); for rabbinic sources see, e.g., the discussion of *'ed/'ed* in b. *'Abodah Zarah* 2a; cf. E. Y. Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982), 120–21.
31. Designated "M" by A. Tal in his recent critical edition, and dated by him to before the fourth century C.E.; see E. Tal, *The Samaritan Targum of the Pentateuch*, vol. 1 (Tel Aviv: University of Tel Aviv, 1980), 214.
32. A further proof comes from a motif sometimes appended to this one (it appears in *Genesis Rabba*, The Jerusalem Talmud, and some later texts): "He saw his mother's image and his passions cooled, [as it says] "from there he 'shepherded' the stone of Israel." This reading obviously takes the "stone of Israel" as a reference to Rachel; but if so it understands *ro'eh* not as "shepherded" but as "saw."
33. We saw above this causal reading of "from there, thence," and it might equally well apply here. But it may also be that the word *mi-sham* is being understood here as *mi-shum*, "because," "on account of."
34. The same motif had appeared in somewhat different form in *Midrash Tanḥuma* (*Bemidbar*, 19).
35. The preposition "in place of" in Hebrew (*taḥat*) also means "under."
36. Cf. Targum Onkelos *ad loc.* The verb "wrestle" here is being understood as derived from the word *sarar*, "be mighty" or "be exalted."
37. They were so punished for having revealed divine secrets—or, in another version attributed to R. Hama b. Hanina, because of their boastfulness, since they say (in Gen. 19:13) "*we* are going to destroy this place," whereas even Lot knows enough to correctly attribute the destruction to God ("for the *Lord* is about to destroy this city," Gen. 19:14). See *Genesis Rabba* 68:12.

As a result of their infraction, whatever it was, the angels were exiled and not allowed back into Heaven until Jacob's dream.

38. This meaning is found in some biblical texts: see, e.g., Gen. 18:28, Lam. 2:19, Dan. 10:12.
39. Cf. R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 105 n. 3; R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (*The Anchor Bible*), vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 88–91.
40. See on this idea Y. F. Baer, *Israel Among the Nations* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1955), 86–88; I have discussed it at greater length below, chapter 9. Another possible New Testament echo of this motif is 1 Cor. 15:49.
41. For a translation of the text and useful introduction, see H. G. Lunt, "Ladder of Jacob," in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:401–411.
42. Note in addition to those printed versions cited by Lunt the version found in J. Franko, *Apokrifi i Legendi* (Lvov, 1891), 1:108.
43. It may even be that the word for "ladder" here, *sullam*, is being consciously associated with the similar-sounding *ṣelem*, "image" or "statue." Since the former is a *hapax legomenon* in the Hebrew Bible, occurring only here, commentators might have been encouraged to associate it with some other Hebrew root. (My thanks to Prof. M. Kossovsky for this suggestion.)
44. See above, note 41.
45. In its psychological sense, "affects" here means "emotion" or "feeling"—so applying it to the transfer of midrashic motifs is somewhat metaphorical. Yet precisely because the process in midrash is so often, as in the psychological usage, an unconscious one, it strikes me as a happy phrase to use.

5.

Inaccessible Bones

We have seen above how different midrashic motifs, originally created in order to clarify or elaborate specific points in the biblical narrative, ultimately came together to create a Joseph somewhat different from that found in the Bible itself. He was, for early exegetes, a strikingly handsome young man—so much so that women became infatuated at the mere sight of him, casting their precious jewels at his feet, or cutting their hands with knives in contemplation of his beauty. Nor was his physical appearance entirely accidental: for Joseph had cultivated his good looks, and in this he displayed an adolescent vanity that was apparently not unrelated to the trials that subsequently overtook him. Indeed, as a youth Joseph had hardly been beyond reproach: his "evil reports" about his brothers had not only engendered their hatred for him, but had in and of themselves constituted a moral defect for which he was punished by being sold as a slave. And even on the day of his greatest trial, when Mrs. Potiphar seized him by his garment, Joseph's behavior was not, at least initially, beyond reproach: he had willingly gone to the deserted house, knowing full well what was waiting for him, and intending to cooperate. It was only thanks to the miraculous appearance of his father's countenance *in extremis* that Joseph was suddenly reminded of his duties and fled from the house—ultimately to suffer the vengeance of his scorned mistress, yet, it is clear from the rest of his story, also chastened and strengthened thereby, and thus able to rise not only over the mighty nation of Egypt, but over the past defects of his own character, in order to emerge as the virtuous and exemplary leader we encounter at the end of Genesis.

The Broader Context

The events in Potiphar's house thus constitute a turning point in Joseph's life for early exegetes, and there is something quite appropriate about the epithet "Joseph the Virtuous" being connected with his behavior in, as we have seen, specifically this incident. But having examined various motifs surrounding this incident and their development and connection with other motifs, we have still not quite