

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI ARI WEISS

Except for Chanukah

Throughout the many generations, the Jewish people have had sages of the highest caliber who dedicated their genius to the Torah and its interpretation, and were subsequently made immortal by their rulings and decisions which last until today. While everyone admits to the brilliance and erudition of all of our great scholars, when it comes to the question of which to follow, especially when there is a conflict of opinions, specific communities of Jews will often follow the rulings of their sage, while others will follow the leader of their respective community.

One common example is that of Maimonides (Rambam). Maimonides wrote a commentary which he claimed would put an end to the need of any future commentary, entitled the Mishne Torah, which is a complete book of Jewish life and law. Any person with a question regarding an aspect of religious practice need only open the correct volume of Mishne Torah and there he or she will find the guidance being sought. However, an astute Jew of Eastern-European descent may quickly realize that Maimonides cites and rules almost entirely according to Sefardic practice, rarely taking into account Ashkenazic custom and tradition. One will find, therefore, that although Jews of Eastern-European descent respect and admire Maimonides, they usually will follow the rulings of Ashkenazic sages as, for example, the commentary of Tosafot, which contains rulings of generations of Ashkenazic scholars beginning with the grandsons of Rashi in the twelfth century. Sometimes Ashkenazim and Sefardim will follow Maimonides, perhaps both may follow Tosafot, but whenever in disagreement, Ashkenazim always side with Tosafot (or perhaps a different Ashkenazic sage), and Sefardim with Maimonides.

Except for Chanukah.

For some reason, when it comes to the holiday of Chanukah, something goes awry. When one opens up the Talmud one sees many hot topics of debate regarding observance of Chanukah (this was long before the well-known debate which came about with the advent of the

English language, namely, how to spell Chanukah). One such debate involves how many Chanukiot (Menorahs) one must light in the home. The debate is taken up by the commentators, and Maimonides maintains that every member of the household should have his or her own candelabra, a custom which should be familiar to most Ashkenazic families. Tosafot, on the other hand, maintain that too many flames in the window detracts from the mitzvah and therefore, instead, one person only should light one Menorah on behalf of the entire household, a custom recognized and practiced by Sefardim throughout the world. So, there you have it: On Chanukah Sefardim follow Tosafot instead of Maimonides, and Ashkenazim do the opposite, choosing Maimonides over their own Tosafot. Why should there be such an anomaly in Jewish law, and how might its occurrence be associated with Chanukah?

Perhaps an answer can be gleaned from how the Torah describes the lighting of the first Menorah, the one in the Tabernacle. There, after G-d commands Moses to instruct Aaron the High Priest to kindle the lights of the Great Menorah, and Aaron dutifully follows the instructions exactly, the Torah continues with an out-of-place description of the Menorah: "V'zeh maaseh Hamenorah, Mikshah Zahav. Ad yereich, Ad pircha, mikshah he" "This is the way the Menorah was made: from one piece of gold. From its center branch (thick section) to its flowers (delicate, thin sections), it was one piece of gold."

Now, we already know what the Menorah looks like from an earlier account. What, then, is the significance of this superfluous description when all we're really interested in hearing about is the lighting of the Menorah?

The answer, I believe, is that the lighting of the Menorah is a symbol of the unity of the Jewish people. Just as the Menorah is fashioned from one solid piece of gold, so too are all Jews intimately connected at our source. Some Jews might be like the thin, delicate flower ornaments of the Menorah, representing a weak or relatively small connection to Jewish heritage, while others are like the thick, sturdy center column of the Menorah, representing a strong sense of Jewish identity, upon which others may rely for strength. Either way, we are all hewn from the same piece of gold. The act of lighting the Menorah, which brings together all the branches into one Mitzvah, therefore symbolizes



the powerful and holy unity of the Jewish people.

How better to express this feeling of unity than for Ashkenazim and Sefardim to follow the rulings of each others' Halachic leader. We don't have to agree in order to be unified, but we must never lose sight of our connection one to another, and that which binds us together as Jews: the Torah and our adherence to its precepts. After all, that's what the Maccabees were fighting for, and it is truly the message of the holiday of Chanukah. ©2012 Rabbi A. Weiss

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will carry on distributing these essays each week, so people from all over the world can continue to learn and be inspired by his Torah.

Reuben is the leader who might have been but never was. He was Jacob's firstborn. Jacob said of him on his deathbed, "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honour, excelling in power." (Gen. 49:3) This is an impressive tribute, suggesting physical presence and commanding demeanour.

More significantly, in his early years Reuben consistently appeared to be the most morally sensitive of Jacob's children. He was Leah's son, and keenly felt his mother's disappointment that she was not Jacob's favourite. Here is the first description of him as a child:

"During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah." (Gen. 30:14)

Mandrakes were thought to be an aphrodisiac. Reuben knew this and immediately thought of his mother. It was a touching gesture but it misfired because he presented them to Leah in the presence of Rachel and unintentionally caused an argument between them.

The next episode in which we see Reuben is far more troubling: "Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrat, that is, Bethlehem... ^ While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept [vayishkav] with his father's concubine Bilhah..." (Gen. 35:19-22)

If understood literally this would amount to a major sin. Sleeping with your father's concubine was not only a sexual crime; it was an unforgivable act of treason and betrayal, as we discover later in Tanach when Absalom decides to rebel against his father David and replace him as king. Ahitophel gives him the following advice: "Sleep with your father's concubines, whom he left to take care of the palace. Then all Israel will hear that you have made yourself obnoxious to your father, and the hands of everyone with you will be more resolute." (2 Samuel 16:21)

According to the Sages, the text about Reuben is not to be understood literally. (Shabbat 55a-b) After Rachel died, Jacob had moved his bed to the tent of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid. This, felt Reuben, was an intolerable humiliation for his mother. It was hard for Leah to endure the fact that Jacob loved her sister more. It would have been altogether unbearable for her to discover that he even preferred Rachel's handmaid. So Reuben moved Jacob's bed from Bilhah's tent to Leah's. The verb *vayishkav* should therefore be translated not as "slept with" but "changed the sleeping arrangement."

At this point, however, the text does a strange thing. It says, "Reuben went in and slept with [or changed the sleeping arrangement of] his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it..." and then signals a paragraph break in the middle of the sentence. The sentence ends: "Jacob had twelve sons." This is very unusual indeed. What it suggests is an audible silence. Communication had completely broken down between Jacob and Reuben. If the Sages are correct in their interpretation, then this is one of the greatest tragedies in the whole of Genesis. Jacob clearly believed that Reuben had slept with his concubine Bilhah. He cursed him for it on his deathbed: "Unstable as water, you will not excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch, and defiled it." (Gen. 49:4)

Yet according to the Sages, this did not happen. Had Jacob been willing to speak to Reuben he would have discovered the truth, but Jacob grew up in a family that lacked open, candid communication (as we saw a few weeks ago, during our discussion of parshat Toldot). Thus, for many years Reuben was suspected by his father of a sin he had not committed -- all because he cared about the feelings of his mother.

Which brings us to the third episode in Reuben's life, the most tragic of all. Jacob favoured Joseph, son of his beloved Rachel, and the other brothers knew it. When he gave Joseph a visible sign of favouritism, the richly embroidered cloak, the brothers resented it yet more. When Joseph began to have dreams of the rest of the family bowing down to him, the brothers' animosity reached boiling point. When they were far from home, tending the flocks, and Joseph appeared in the distance, their hatred made them decide then and there to kill him. Reuben alone resisted: "When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him [Joseph] from their hands. 'Let's not take his life,' he said. 'Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him.' Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father." (Gen. 37:21-22)

Reuben's plan was simple. He persuaded the brothers not to kill Joseph but rather to let him die by leaving him to starve in a pit. He intended to return later, when the brothers had moved on, to rescue him.

When he returned, however, Joseph was no longer there. He had been sold as a slave. Reuben was devastated.

Three times Reuben tried to help but despite his best intentions, his efforts failed. He was responsible for the one recorded quarrel between Leah and Rachel. His father wrongly suspected him of a major sin and cursed him on his deathbed. He failed to save Joseph. Reuben knew when things were not right, and tried to act to make changes for the better, but he somehow lacked the prudence, confidence or courage to achieve his desired outcome. He should have waited for Leah to be alone before giving her the mandrakes. He should have remonstrated directly with his father about his sleeping arrangements. He should have physically taken Joseph safely back home.

What happened to Reuben to make him lack confidence? The Torah gives a poignant and unmistakable hint. Listen to these verses describing the birth of Leah's (and Jacob's) first two children: "When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, 'It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now.' She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, 'Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too.' So she named him Simeon." (Gen. 29:32-33)

Both times, it was Leah, not Jacob, who named the child -- and both names were a cry to Jacob to notice her and love her -- if not for herself then at least because she has given him children. Jacob evidently did not notice.

Reuben became what he became because -- so the text seems to imply -- his father's attention was elsewhere; he did not care for either Leah or her sons (the text itself says, "the Lord saw that Leah was not loved"). Reuben knew this and felt intensely his mother's shame and his father's apparent indifference.

People need encouragement if they are to lead. It is fascinating to contrast the hesitant Reuben with the confident -- even overconfident -- Joseph, who was loved and favoured by his father. If we want our children to have the confidence to act when action is needed, then we have to empower, encourage and praise them.

There is a fascinating Mishnah in Ethics of the Fathers: "Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five (pre-eminent) disciples, namely Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, Rabbi Yose the Priest, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arach. He used to recount their praise: Eliezer ben Hyrcanus -- a plastered well that never loses a drop. Joshua ben Chananya -- happy the one who gave him birth. Yose the Priest -- a pious man. Shimon ben Netanel -- a man who fears sin. Elazar ben

Arach -- an ever-flowing spring." (Mishnah Avot 2:10-11)

Why does the Mishnah, whose aim is to teach us lasting truths, give us this apparently trivial account of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's pupils and how he used to praise them? The answer, I believe, is that the Mishnah is telling us how to raise disciples, how to be a coach, mentor and guide: by using focused praise.

The Mishnah does not simply say that Yochanan ben Zakkai said good things about his students. It uses an unusual locution: "He used to count [moneh] their praise", meaning, his positive remarks were precise and accurately targeted. He told each of his disciples what their specific strength was.

Eliezer ben Hyrcanus had an outstanding memory. At a time when the Oral Law was not yet written down, he could recall the teachings of the tradition better than anyone else. Elazar ben Arach was creative, able to come up with an endless stream of fresh interpretations. When we follow our particular passions and gifts, we contribute to the world what only we can give.

However, the fact that we may have an exceptional gift may also mean that we have conspicuous deficiencies. No one has all the strengths. Sufficient if we have one. But we must also know what we lack. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus became so fixated on the past that he resisted change even when it was decided on by the majority of his colleagues. Eventually he was excommunicated for failing to accept his colleagues' ruling (Baba Metzia 59b).

Elazar ben Arach's fate was even sadder. After the death of Yochanan ben Zakkai, he separated from his colleagues. They went to Yavneh; he went to Hamat (Emmaus). It was a pleasant place to live and it was where his wife's family lived. Apparently he was so confident of his intellectual gifts that he believed he could maintain his scholarship by himself. Eventually he forgot everything he had ever learned (Avot de-Rabbi Natan 14:6). The man more gifted than his contemporaries eventually died while making almost no lasting contribution to the tradition.

There is a delicate balance between the neglect that leads to someone to lack the confidence to do the necessary deed, and the excessive praise or favouritism that creates overconfidence and the belief that you are better than others. That balance is necessary if we are to be the sunlight that helps others grow.

Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl



... "Anybody got a match?"

z"l © 2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**S**he is more righteous than I" (Genesis 38:26)
The biblical drama of the peregrinations of Jacob ended with the patriarch's return to his father's house and homeland in last week's reading of Vayishlah, and now with the reading of Vayeshev the riveting story of Joseph begins. Just as Jacob's exilic wanderings open with his dream of a ladder connecting heaven and earth, so do Joseph's wanderings begin with his dreams of the brothers' sheaves of grain bowing down to his sheaf and then of the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to Joseph.

The Joseph story continues at a fast pace, with the brothers' jealousy (a jealousy unto death) resulting in the sale of Joseph into Egyptian servitude and leading to the brothers' deception of their father Jacob, making him think that a savage beast had devoured his favorite son and heir apparent (Gen. 37:1-36).

The biblical account skips a chapter, however, before telling us of Joseph's adventures in Egypt; we must wait for that until Chapter 39, after which we remain with Joseph until his death at the end of the Book of Genesis. Chapter 38—a clear interruption of the Joseph story line—provides a fascinating interlude dealing with brother Judah, his three sons, and daughter-in-law Tamar, who enters into an act of deceptive harlotry with her father-in-law because she felt herself thwarted from her anticipated levirate marriage with Judah's third son, Shelah.

But why does this story—replete with sex, intrigue and moral outrage against the wrong party—find its place in the midst of the Joseph story? Let the Bible first finish with Joseph, and then bring in this tale of Judah, perhaps even as important background for the Messianic legacy he is to receive from Jacob on his death bed (Gen. 49:8-10).

And this leads to a second question. Apparently, Messianism is an important factor here, since Judah is the tribe-producer of the Messiah, scion of the Davidic dynasty who will bring the ultimate peace and the ingathering of all the nations.

Perez, the Jacob-like character who pushes ahead and breaks out his elder twin Zerah's initial lead, to emerge first, is the seventh-generation grandfather of Boaz, in turn great-grandfather of King David (Ruth 4:18-22). But why choose a forbidden sexual act of immorality, a father-in-law (Judah) with his daughter-in-law (Tamar), and an act of harlotry at that, which adds even further transgression, as the union which will ultimately produce the Messiah? Ought the Messiah not emerge from a much purer act of sexual love within the context of marriage in accordance with Moses and Israel? The entire Book of Genesis after the choosing of Abraham is concerned first and foremost with who

will receive the legacy of the firstborn, which son will be the torchbearer to pass down the baton of Messianism: the responsibility of bringing to the world peace and redemption by teaching compassionate righteousness and moral justice, to the next generation. Our portion Vayeshev begins with Joseph, seemingly the choice of his father Jacob, who gave him the striped tunic of many colors.

But Joseph doesn't dream of uniting heaven and earth, God and world; he dreams of mastery over his brothers, domination on land and in sky, and in his two dreams God and Israel do not appear even once! And moreover gathering sheaves of grain, agriculture, was not the pursuit of the family of Abraham in the Promised Land of Canaan; it was the activity discovered in Egypt, a far more sophisticated and corrupt culture than existed in the Land of Israel. Joseph hankered after the fleshpots of Egypt, not the piety of "Palestine"; Joseph—at least at this point in his life—did not seem worthy of the legacy of the firstborn.

And so the Bible offers another option for the bearer of the familial blessing. You will remember that it was Judah who cleverly saved Joseph's life from death by starvation and scorpions in the pit by offering the brothers financial gain by selling their sibling into Egypt (Gen. 37:26, 27). At this point he marries a Canaanite woman with whom he has three sons; the eldest, Er, he marries off to Tamar. Er dies early, and Tamar is given in levirate marriage to Onan, Er's brother. Levirate marriage enables the brother to grant his hapless sibling a child and heir (even though he is dead) by impregnating—and taking responsibility for—his widow.

Since the child born to Tamar would be considered Er's and not Onan's, Onan refused to give his seed to Tamar. Onan too dies young as a Divine punishment for neglecting his responsibility to his elder sibling.

Shelah is left; Judah is frightened to give Tamar as wife to another of his sons lest that son also die.

Tamar poses as a harlot, seduces Judah, and becomes pregnant with his seed. So Perez and ultimately Boaz and King David will ultimately be born.

Joseph attempts to escape his Abrahamic destiny by looking towards Egypt and its naturalism for his future. Judah likewise seems uninterested in guaranteeing Abrahamic fulfillment. Tamar is desperate to carry Judah's seed and continue the road to redemption. Judah also publicly admits his transgression with Tamar, praising her for being more interested in the Jewish future—by taking responsibility for past generations—than he was. Repentance, responsibility to past and commitment to future are the skill that Messianism is made of. Hence the story of Judah at this junction is a prefiguration of why it is eventually Judah and not Joseph who gives over the familial baton. ©2020 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN**Wein Online**

This week's Torah reading begins with a simple statement that our father Yaakov settled in the land where his father had lived his entire life – the land of Canaan. Why is it so important that the Torah should bother to mention that this land was the land of Canaan? It seems obvious that we know from previous chapters where the family of Yaakov lived, and that it was the land of Canaan that would later be called the land of Israel. What special significance is there now when the Torah adds to the original text the descriptive phrase that it was the land of Canaan?

As usual, in discussing such issues the commentators over the centuries have added their insights and wisdom to help us understand and appreciate the greatness and message of the biblical text itself. Nothing appears in the Torah at random, though there are a few instances when the Talmud does identify certain words and phrases as being additional decorations of beauty on the Torah text. Considering these extraneous words, many explanations and comments have been offered throughout the millennia of Jewish life and scholarship. Each of these elucidations adds understanding to the holiness of the text.

My addition to this wealth of scholarship is the idea that the phrase “the land of Canaan” occurs at the very end of the verse, after it is stated that Yaakov dwelled in the land of his father. The order of the phrases is important because it teaches us an important lesson on how to view our attachment to the land of Israel.

Yaakov came to live there not because it was the land Canaan – its physical location, its landscape, and its geographical structure. Rather, his entire attachment to it was that it was the land where his father had dwelt, and that his father did so under the commandment of the Almighty. Thus, the attachment and bond of the Jewish people, the descendants of Yaakov are not based on purely external considerations. Rather, it is based upon our religious heritage and family tradition that has, over the ages, taught us that this is our home, this is where we belong and where we should live.

Over the long exile of the Jewish people, this attachment to the land has never wavered or waned. It is interesting that even when the Zionist movement had to vote whether to accept the country of Uganda as a substitute for the land of Israel, even the most secular of labor Zionists refused to allow this to happen. For the Jewish people throughout the ages, it was always about settling in the land of Israel and nowhere else. The failed colonies of Baron Hirsch in South America and the rest of the world, as compared to the successful colonies of the Baron Rothschild in the land

of Israel, only serve to illustrate this point in historical terms. Yaakov is going home, and he knows exactly where home is located. ©2020 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS**Shabbat Forshpeis**

Genesis is the story of the dissolution and then reconstruction of the family. Rabbi David Silber argues that the patriarchal and matriarchal narrative reveals how fragmentation of families became more pronounced with each succeeding generation.

- Avraham's (Abraham) eldest two sons, Yitzchak (Isaac) and Yishmael, have a serious falling out. Yishmael, according to the Torah, is metzachek, literally he was “Isaac-ing,” trying to supplant Yitzchak and become the covenantal heir. They part, but never threaten each other. (Genesis 21:9-10)

- Yitzchak and Rivka's (Rebecca) children, Ya'akov (Jacob) and Esav (Esau), have a more serious falling out. At the behest of Rivka, Ya'akov takes the blessing from Esav, an act that results in Esav's threatening his life once his father Yitzchak dies. (Genesis 27:41)

- Ya'akov's children have an even more serious falling out. Yosef (Joseph) dreams of sheaves and stars (Genesis 37:7,9). Sheaves represent land, growing as they do from the ground. Stars are the metaphor for children, as God tells Avraham his seed will be like the stars in the heavens. (Genesis 15:5) Together, land and children are the foundation of the covenant. Thus, the brothers believe that Yosef, by the nature of his dreams, sees himself as the sole covenantal heir. The brothers, therefore, take action, and try to kill Yosef. (Genesis 37:24)

And here, the narrative makes a slow but dramatic U-turn. By the end of the Yosef story, the brothers make peace. Unlike Avraham who limits the covenantal blessing to Yitzchak, and Yitzchak who limits the covenantal blessing to Ya'akov, Ya'akov includes all of his sons in the covenant. They are all blessed by Ya'akov. (Genesis 49:1,2)

Only when the family is intact can the Book of Exodus, the story of Am Yisrael begin, teaching that the best model of nation is family.

This has been a cornerstone of my rabbinate. Whenever considering the needs of Am Yisrael, I substitute the word “family” for “nation” – and do my best to act accordingly.

©2020 Hebrew



ZWANI.COM

Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Three Months of Separation

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

"**A**bout three months later, Yehudah was told: 'Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot'" (*Bereishit* 38:24). Based on this, we can conclude that a woman's pregnancy becomes noticeable after three months. Therefore, a woman must wait three months after being divorced or widowed before she can remarry. This is to ensure that if she becomes pregnant, we can be certain of who the father is. Usually, the waiting period does not pose a difficulty for the woman. It can actually be quite positive, as it allows for a needed break between two chapters in her life, a sort of "time out."

However, there are some cases where this requirement is problematic, such as the following case.

The law of a three-month separation and waiting period applies to a woman who converts to Judaism. This is so it will be clear whether she conceived before or after her conversion. A minority opinion disagrees and maintains that the separation and waiting period does not apply to a woman converting to Judaism. The logic behind this is that once she decides to convert, she will make sure to avoid getting pregnant before her conversion, and therefore she is permitted to marry immediately. Now, let us say that there is a non-Jewish couple who have both decided to convert. Would they be required to separate for three months? The minority opinion agrees that they are required to separate. This is because the logic above applies only to a situation in which a woman is converting alone. In contrast, in the case of a couple converting together, one might argue that since they are used to living together and will continue to do so after they convert, she will not view the conversion as a major turning point in the same way the single convert will (and thus will not resolve to avoid pregnancy before conversion). Thus, she is required to wait three months after her conversion before returning to live with her husband. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Perception

While each of our forefathers were righteous men and had a special relationship with Hashem, they were human and subject to human frailties. We do not gloss over these frailties as we find in other religions, but we also understand that when the Torah

speaks of the imperfections in the forefathers, we cannot compare those same imperfections as would be described of any common man. The minute amount of imperfection found in the forefathers appears exaggerated because they held themselves to such a high standard that a slight deviance from that standard appears intolerable. With this in mind, we must examine Ya'akov's faults in Parashat Vayeishev.

The Torah tells us, "And Yisrael (Ya'akov) loved Yosef more than all his sons since he was a child of his old age, and he made him a fine woolen tunic. His brothers saw that it was he whom their father loved most of all his brothers, so they hated him, and they were not able to speak to him peaceably." These two sentences heighten the tension between Yosef and his brothers to such an extent they cannot speak with him. While Yosef had already created friction when he brought gossip to his father about any activities that he judged to be inappropriate in his brothers' behavior, the fact that Ya'akov openly favored Yosef was too much for them.

The Rabbis try to explain a difficulty found in our sentences. The Moshav Z'keinim asks why Yosef is titled the son of his old age, and a tunic made for him, when Binyamin was seven years younger than Yosef. He answers that Binyamin was too young to be given such a fine coat and would likely dirty it. Still, Binyamin was the true son of his old age. The Kli Yakar understands this sentence differently. He takes the word "zaken, old age" and translates it differently to mean that he was a "ben z'kunim, a very wise son" not a "son of his old age." There is precedent in the Torah to associate the word zaken which normally means "old" as "wise" instead. Ya'akov spent much of his time teaching Yosef all of the special secrets of the Torah that he had learned in the Yeshiva of Shem and Eiver. Ya'akov saw in Yosef a son who could retain all of this knowledge and pass it on to future generations. That clarifies his reason for loving Yosef and also for the fine woolen cloak of leadership. It also may clarify why Binyamin was not called the "son of his old age" as that was not the applicable understanding of that phrase.

As a background to our story, we saw a similar statement in Parashat Vayeitzei two weeks ago. Ya'akov wished to marry Rachel, yet Lavan replaced her with her older sister, Leah. He later marries Rachel and remains married to Leah. "He (Ya'akov) also came to Rachel and he also loved Rachel more than Leah, and he worked for him (Lavan) further, another seven years. Hashem saw that Leah was the hated one, so He opened her womb; but Rachel remained barren. Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuven, as she had said, 'Because Hashem has discerned my humiliation, for now my husband will love me.'" Later we find that the sons of Leah sensed this rivalry with Rachel, and it affected their inability to live peacefully with Yosef. Still, our Rabbis understood that

all was not lost between the brothers. Reuven should have been the leader as the firstborn of all the sons, yet he watched as the leadership appeared to go to Yosef. Reuven did not complain (as did Eisav) and he even attempted to save Yosef from the other brothers by rescuing him from the pit.

We know that Ya'akov loved Rachel, but did he really hate Leah? Some translations wish to say that Leah was unloved, not hated, but the text itself is contradictory. In one sentence we are told that "he also loved Rachel more than Leah", but this implies that he also loved Leah. In the next sentence we are told, "Hashem saw that Leah was the hated one," a clear understanding that she was not loved. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains this contradiction. Ya'akov knew that Lavan was a trickster and expected him to lie. However, Ya'akov did not expect that the righteous Leah would lie just like her father. Hashem looked into her heart and understood that the only reason that she lied was to avoid having to marry the evil Eisav. Ya'akov did not comprehend this, and so Leah was loved as his wife but hated for her lies. Hashem opened her womb while shutting Rachel's so that the love that Ya'akov had for Leah would increase to the point that there would be no further hatred. Still, the perception was there.

Ya'akov's problem in both these situations was perception. Ya'akov did not abandon his sons or Leah because of his love for Yosef and Rachel. Yet it is clear that both Leah and her children perceived that they were treated differently and therefore unloved. It is extremely unlikely that this was the case, yet perception is what matters in any relationship. In particular, Reuven demonstrates this perception when he moves Ya'akov's bed to Leah's tent after Rachel died. Thus, even before we see the negative behavior of Yosef to Leah's sons, and before the making of the cloak of leadership, it is clear that Reuven felt slighted for his mother which led to him being stripped of his firstborn status of inheritance. Shimon and Levi may also have acted against Shechem and his father because they did not perceive that Ya'akov would defend their sister's virtue as he remained silent. Levi only avoids punishment with several subsequent acts of courage and faith which returned him to a leadership position.

It would be incorrect to believe that Ya'akov was entirely at fault here. Yosef aggravates his relationship with the brothers by bringing gossip about them to Ya'akov and telling over his dreams to the brothers. The brothers, however, do fault Ya'akov for listening to the gossip instead of reprimanding Yosef. They also expected a stronger rebuke from Ya'akov based on their interpretation of Yosef's dreams. This weak response led eventually to the kidnapping and selling of Yosef, a sin which caused punishment for the brothers which we still experience today.

It is difficult enough to raise a family, and we are sincere in our efforts to do so. Just like Ya'akov, we are inevitably going to make mistakes. Since we are often unaware of the perception by our children of actions which we may do innocently but are interpreted differently, we may feel hurt by their expressed perception of favoritism. Our only choice is to try to make each of our children feel special and loved for who they are. Never miss an opportunity to tell each child how much you love him and value him. Sibling rivalry should not apply to a parent's love. My brothers and I would always joke, "Mama loves me best." The truth is that she made each of us feel that this was true. May Hashem help each of us to accomplish that same feeling in our own children. © 2020 Rabbi D. Levin



RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**A**nd he said to them: Please listen to this dream that I dreamed." (Gen. 37:6) Yosef was not a fool. The Torah describes him as a 'ben zekunim,' a wise son. If he knew that his brothers were jealous and hated him, why antagonize them? When he told them he had a great dream, they despised him. What is the point of pushing the issue and urging them to hear more of what was upsetting them?

Numerous commentaries approach this question with the perspective that this dream was a prophecy which the brothers needed to hear. One explanation is that since they would one day be at Yosef's mercy, they should get on his good side now. R' Yehuda Henkin interestingly points out that they were shepherds. A dream about farming would be unusual, hence Yosef pointed to it as a marker of truth.

However, even as a prophecy, which later prophets had to rebuke the Jews to listen to, it seems that his urgent request that they listen would only stir up more ill will and harsh feelings. Why would he do this if he understood the repercussions?

The Ohr Hachaim discusses the conversation in light of the Gemara in Brachos which relates to the interpretation of dreams. There, a person who has a dream is advised to have it interpreted in a positive way. The dream's power lies in the interpretation and the way a dream is explained will cause future results. One of the requirements is that it be the day he awakens from the dream, which is why Yosef was so insistent that they listen to him at that moment. But what the Ohr Hachaim also points out shows us the true wisdom behind Yosef's actions.

As we said, dreams follow the interpretation. One who wishes a favorable one will retell the dream to someone who loves him and wants the best for him.

Despite this, Yosef wanted to tell the dream to his brothers, who openly despised him!

What Yosef was doing here was making a tremendously powerful statement. He was telling his brothers, "I love you, even though you don't realize it." When he'd gone to their father with reports about their behavior, it was with the best of intentions, so that they could improve and be the best people they could be. But they didn't see that.

When he asked them to listen to the dream, it was so they would realize that he trusted them to love him and look for his best interests too. He made himself vulnerable to show them his true feelings towards them. [He did this later, as well, when he revealed himself to them. To avoid their embarrassment, he sent all his servants out of the room, though he was putting himself at risk.]

Had the brothers considered this, they would have seen that it was not Yosef's ego that fueled the dreams, but that they were a message for all of them from Hashem. Sadly, they couldn't appreciate the depth of his gesture, and our nation paid the price dearly.

A little boy was holding two apples, one in each hand. His mother came in and softly asked her son with a smile: "Darling, could Mommy have one of your apples?"

The boy looked up at his mom for a few seconds, and then he quickly bit into each apple.

The mother felt the smile on her face freeze, as she tried hard not to reveal her disappointment in her son's failure to share.

But then, the boy handed one of his bitten apples to his mom with a huge, loving smile and said: "Here, Mommy. Take this one. It's sweeter."

No matter who you are, how experienced you are, and how knowledgeable you think you are, be careful. What you see may not be the reality. ©2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ Z"L

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "And it happened after these things that the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and the baker transgressed against their master, the king of Egypt (Gen. 40:1).

Rashi brings the Midrash that the cupbearer was imprisoned because a fly was found in Pharaoh's goblet of wine; the baker was imprisoned because a small pebble was found in the king's bread.

The first paragraph of the Shulchan Aruch (the Code of Jewish Law) reads: " 'I have set G-d before me always' (Psalms 16:8) is a major principle of Torah -- because a person's behavior when he is alone in the privacy of his home is not like his behavior when he is in the imminent presence of a king. How much more so if one realizes that he is in the presence of the Great King, Almighty G-d, whose glory fills the universe: He

would have the reverence, humility and fear of G-d."

Our tzaddikim (righteous ones) never lost sight of being in G-d's presence. Everything that transpired was contemplated as to how it applied to their service of G-d. The story is told of one such tzadik, the Alter (Elder) of Kelm who once found a small chip of wood in his bread. This immediately brought to mind the story of the king of Egypt's baker who was imprisoned for allowing a pebble to be in the king's bread. The Alter cogitated, "A defect in a person's bread is hardly grounds for so severe a punishment. No one will be punished for this chip of wood in the bread, especially since it was totally accidental. Why, then, was the king's baker punished so harshly?"

The Alter concluded, "It was because when one serves or relates to the king, the standard of perfection is much greater than when relating to other people. One must exercise much greater caution to prevent any defects. In serving the king, even a small defect is a major offense!"

"I am in the service of the King of kings," continued the Alter. "Is my behavior before Him without defect? Have I been cautious enough to avoid even accidental infractions?" *Dvar Torah from Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. ©2014 Rabbi K. Packouz z"l & aish.com*

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Lelamed Weekly Dvar

As Yosef makes his way to Egypt, he establishes himself as a loyal employee of Potifar. The Torah attests that Yosef's boss trusted him with every aspect of life, only having to think about what to eat (39:4-6). When Potiphar's wife tries to seduce Yosef, he refuses. Yosef explains that he has been entrusted with taking care of things, that he is second only to her, that he cannot commit this evil, and that it would be a sin against G-d (39:9). Why did Yosef have to explain all this to Potifar's wife? Couldn't he have just said no? Further, why does the Torah relate his elaborate explanation?

Rabbi Zweig explains that Yosef explained to Potifar's wife that breaking his boss's trust would destroy his character. Yosef spent 33 words describing how it was wrong to betray someone's trust and only two words explaining that it was a sin. This narrative shows the importance Yosef placed on maintaining his moral integrity. As we read and study Yosef's actions in a foreign land, we can learn a lot from his actions and strive to emulate his qualities. ©2020

Rabbi S. Ressler and Lelamed, Inc.

