

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

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

More significantly, in their early years Reuben consistently appears 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 tragic: Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem) ... While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept [vayishkav] with his father's concubine Bilhah ... (Gen. 35: 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 Tanakh. 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 (Shabbat 55a-b), the text about Reuben is not to be understood literally. 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 bear 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 rare 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 (see *Covenant & Conversation*, Toledot 5774). Thus for 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, 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 them, 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, there and then, to kill him. Reuben alone resisted: When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him 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 don't 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 in a pit to starve. He intended to return later, when the brothers have moved on, to rescue him. When he returned, however, Joseph was no longer

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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 what is the right thing to do, but somehow lacked the confidence or courage to carry it through to completion. He should have waited to give Leah the mandrakes when she was alone. He should have remonstrated 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 three 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 names 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 over-confident Joseph, 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 (Avot 2: 10-11): Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five (pre-eminent) disciples, namely Rabbi Eliezer

ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananya, Rabbi Yose the Priest, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh. 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 Arakh: an ever-flowing spring.

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 what he used to call 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 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 Arakh 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 Arakh'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. © 2013 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**T**hey said to one another, 'Here comes that dreamer! Come, now, let us murder him and throw him into one of the pits....'" (Genesis 37:19)

"We are such stuff as dreams are made of." (Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 4, Scene 1)

From our Biblical portion of Vayeshev until the conclusion of the Book of Genesis, Joseph, most beloved and favored son of Jacob, takes center stage. His chief characteristic is that he is a dreamer, a trait which attracts both devotees and detractors. Indeed, Joseph can hardly wait to relate to his family these dreams in which he plays the central role. They engender deep jealousy in the hearts of his brothers - a jealousy which is so consuming that they are ready to murder him - whereas, his father took the dreams very seriously and anxiously awaited their fulfillment. (Gen. 37:11, Rashi ad loc.)

Let us analyze the dreams in order to understand their "genesis" within Joseph and the reason for the strong feelings they incurred in the people around him. The reader will remember that sources as diverse as our sacred Bible, the Talmud (especially B.T. Berakhot, chapter 9), William Shakespeare, Sigmund Freud, and the world of psychoanalysis all have enormous respect for dreams. They are an important key to the mind and personality of the dreamer.

Two Biblical portions ago, we were told of Father Jacob's dream, "a ladder established on earth whose top reached up to the heavens, with angels of G-d ascending and descending upon it" (Gen. 28:12). Jacob dreams of uniting earth and heaven, the material and the spiritual, the physical realm with the supernal realm. G-d is at the center of the dream, Jacob's descendants will spread out in every direction to bring the Abrahamic blessing (of compassionate righteousness and moral justice) to all the families of the earth, and Jacob himself will ultimately return to the land of Israel (ibid, 13-16).

Now we see the two dreams of Joseph-the darling son of Jacob, who received not only his father's almost exclusive love, but also the special tunic of striped colors-which sent him the clear message that he was the chosen, the heir apparent, and the future leader of the incipient tribes of Israel.

Joseph first dreams of sheaves of grain, symbolic of the earthly, material blessings. In his dream, Joseph's brothers' sheaves were all bowing down to his sheaf; he then dreamed of the sun, moon and eleven stars, symbolic of the heavenly, spiritual blessings, and that they too were all bowing down to him.

To be sure, he has internalized the familial narrative and the Abrahamic vision. Both the physical

and supernal realm find their place in his dreams with the faith that success in both will enable the family representative (ultimately the Messiah) to bring the combined two blessings to the entire world, indeed to the cosmos.

Jacob is duly impressed with Joseph's grasp of the family mission as well as the preciousness of Joseph's ambition. He is aware of the touch of hubris in his dreams, and probably blames it on immaturity (Joseph is only 17 years old). Apparently, Jacob still feels he has made the right choice.

The brothers are furious. Undoubtedly, their anger is fueled by their jealousy, but they certainly took note of three most disturbing factors in Joseph's dreams. First of all, Joseph dreams of the earthly part of the mission involved in agriculture (sheaves of grain). This represented the all-consuming back-breaking occupation of powerful, pagan and sophisticated Egypt, rather than their ancestral, nurturing and meditative profession of shepherding, so indigenous to the Land of Israel.

Second, G-d does not appear in Joseph's dreams at all; and third, everyone and everything is bowing down to Joseph. For the brothers, this would be blasphemy, totally unbecoming the heir to the Abrahamic legacy.

From this point onwards, much intrigue, deception, exile and eventual rapprochement will take place in the search for the most worthy bearer of the familial heritage. But, above all, the most important challenge facing the entire family-Jacob as well as his sons and future tribes-is to unite behind one person (or perhaps two, as we shall see) to continue the sacred mission.

Indeed, the entire Book of Genesis has its major theme the continuation of Abraham's vision and necessity of his descendants to remain united as one peoplehood of Israel under the G-d of ethical monotheism.

The enormous lesson of this commentary is that a Jewish leader must be not only a "continuator" and a unifier, but also a dreamer. He must dream the dream of Abraham and Jacob, the dream of bringing G-d's message of love, morality and peace to all of humanity. Joseph will mature, he will come to see G-d as the center of the Universe and he will even teach this vision to the Pharaoh of Egypt. When Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream, he insists, "It has nothing to do with me; G-d will respond in order to provide well-bring to Pharaoh" (Gen. 41:16).

And with his dying breath, Joseph makes his brothers swear that when G-d returns them to Israel, they will bring his remains to be interred in the sacred and eternal land. In the final analysis, what kept Joseph staunchly standing on his feet despite his many setbacks and peregrinations was his commitment to the fulfillment of the familial dream. © 2013 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

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The Torah parsha begins with the simple narrative statement that Yaakov settled and "dwelled in the land of the sojourn of his forefathers, the Land of Canaan." That last clause in that sentence - the Land of Canaan - seems to be superfluous. We are already well aware from the previous parshiyot of Bereshith that Avraham and Yitzchak dwelt in the Land of Canaan. Since every word and phrase in the Torah demands our attention and study, the commentators to Torah throughout the ages examined this issue and proposed a number of different lessons and insights.

I believe that the lessons for our time from these words that open our parsha are eerily relevant. Yaakov is forced to live in a hostile environment. The story of the assault on Dina and the subsequent violence and bloodshed between Yaakov's family and the Canaanites serves as the backdrop to this type of life that living in the Land of Canaan entails.

Yaakov is living in a bad neighborhood, amongst many who wish him and his family ill. He is forced to rely on the sword of Shimon and Levi to survive but that is not to his liking or ultimate life purpose. The Land of Canaan is not hospitable to him and his worldview.

The Philistine kings who wished to kidnap and enslave his mother and grandmother are still around or at least their cloned successors are. At the funeral of his father at the Cave of Machpela he must have ruefully mused as to how his grandfather was forced to pay such an exorbitant price for a burial plot.

The Land of Canaan had many unpleasant associations connected to it for Yaakov to contemplate: a king's ransom to Eisav, a rock for a pillow, and crippling encounters with an anonymous foe. All of this and more was his lot in the Land of Canaan.

So what is Yaakov's stubborn attachment to living in the Land of Canaan? Why does he believe that he will be able to eventually dwell there in serenity and security? The answer to these issues is that he realized that this was the land of his ancestors and that the Lord had entered into a covenant with them to grant them that land.

Now it could be that it is called the Land of Canaan but eternally it would be called after his name, the Land of Israel. The land would know many populations and rulers but that would never change its eternal nature of being the Land of Israel. The land is home for Yaakov - the land of his past and his future. It is what binds him to his great ancestral heritage and mission - and he will demand to be buried there as well.

Yaakov overlooks the difficulties and challenges inherent in the Land of Canaan because he lives not only in its geographic confines but rather in the ideal land of his forefathers - in a land of G-dly revelation and

holy purpose. Yaakov will undergo much more pain and suffering in the Land of Canaan before he returns there in final tranquility. But his descendants, the Jewish people will always know it to be the land of their fathers, the Land of Israel. © 2013 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

After Joseph's two dreams his siblings are naturally upset-believing that Joseph had aspirations to control them. The rage turns into jealousy when his father Jacob seems to give credence to Joseph's dream. (Genesis 37:11)

In response, Joseph's brothers set out to Shechem. This is where, just a bit earlier, two of them killed all the male inhabitants for the rape of Dinah, their sister. (Genesis 34) According to the Midrash, the brothers again go to Shechem to decide how to take retribution, this time against Joseph. (Rashi, Genesis 37:12) This is where Jacob sends Joseph to seek out to his brothers' welfare. (Genesis 37:13)

Soncino, the 15th century Italian commentary, explains that, although Jacob could have sent a servant to find out if his sons were well, he purposefully sent Joseph in the hope that he would be able to make peace with them. This begs the question: With the brothers' enmity towards Joseph so great, wasn't Jacob placing Joseph in danger?

Indeed, it can be suggested that Joseph felt that his father had set him up. Note that Joseph doesn't contact his father even after becoming second to the King of Egypt. Joseph may have felt that he was being cast aside, just like those who came before him. (Esau and Ishmael were cast aside by their parents.)

Yet, Joseph could have misread his father. Jacob may have sent Joseph to his brothers because of what occurred to him (Jacob) in his younger years. After Jacob took the blessings from his brother Esau, he is advised by his mother to flee to avoid Esau's wrath. (Genesis 27:43-46) In the end, the advice has devastating results as Jacob does not see his family for twenty-two years. Once growing older, Jacob doesn't want to make the same mistake. And so, when Jacob's sons feud, he adopts a plan which is the direct opposite of what was suggested to him when he was younger. Rather than have Joseph separate from his brothers, he sends Joseph to his siblings in the hope that they will reconcile.

It is often the case that children vow not to make the mistakes of their parents. What is ironic is that even as we try a different path, nothing is a guarantee. Despite Joseph being sent to, rather than

from, his brothers, he remains separated from his family for 22 years.

The message: While Jacob should be lauded for trying a new path, it is often the case that no matter what we do, "the song remains the same." (aval hamanginah tamid nisheret). © 2013 Hebrew 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.

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

Adapted by Avi Shmidman and Dov Karoll

At the beginning of this week's parasha, Rashi (Bereishit 37:2 s.v. eileh) states that, at this point in his life, Yaakov sought to dwell in tranquility, but the ordeal of Yosef sprang upon him. He then generalizes this notion: the righteous seek to dwell in tranquility, but G-d says, "Is it not enough that the righteous will have tranquility in the World-to-Come, that they seek it in this world as well?"

The midrash on which this is based presents a somewhat different version. In the Midrash (Bereishit Rabba 84:3), it is Satan who attacks the desire of righteous people to dwell in tranquility.

Let us return to the formulation common to both Rashi and the Midrash. The righteous do not simply hope for tranquility. The term used is "bikkesh" -- it is a request. The righteous do not ask for wealth or power; they just want to live in tranquility, to have peace and quiet. Although Rashi (Vayikra 26:6 s.v. ve-natatti) states that even if one has other blessings, in the absence of shalom, of peace, it is as if one has nothing, nevertheless, as a dream and as a yearning, tranquility seems to be a moderate request at best. However, the more moderate and limited the request and desire, the more frustrating is its denial. When one holds moderate hopes and they are not fulfilled, how great is the disappointment!

At the end of his life, Yaakov tells Pharaoh, "Few and unpleasant have been the days of my life" (47:9). But were they really so bad? All those years at home with Yitzchak and Rivka, and the fourteen years he spent in study at the yeshiva of Shem and Ever, learning Torah at the feet of the masters? And what about the years in Lavan's house? While he did have to work while there, and he did suffer at Lavan's hands, he nevertheless succeeded in building up his family and fortune. He came there alone and empty-handed, and left with a flourishing family and with wealth.

The key to Yaakov's negative evaluation of his life is his desire for tranquility at the beginning of parashat Vayeshev. Let us look at Yaakov's life surrounding this point, taking both a glance back and a

glance forward, to gain some greater perspective on the significance of this stage.

Turning to last week's parasha: "And Yaakov came to Shekhem, 'shalem,' complete" (33:18). What is the specific connotation of "shalem"? He has survived the challenge of Esav, and he has survived the challenge of Lavan. Esav was out to kill him, and Yaakov managed to dodge that threat. Lavan states at the end of parashat Vayetzei, "It is in my power to do you harm..." (31:29), indicating that Lavan also presented a real physical threat. But both of these threats did not come to pass. Yaakov has survived the external threats, and so he can now settle down, having achieved a state of being "shalem."

But what happens next? First comes the rape of Dina and the response of Shimon and Levi (chapter 34). After that is the story of Reuven and Bilha (35:22). These are crises from within. While the tragedy of Dina could have been attributed to Shekhem, Chazal (Bereishit Rabba 80:1) and Rashi (34:1) also ascribe it to her outgoing nature. Regarding the episode with Reuven, while Chazal (Shabbat 55b) insist that the assertion that Reuven sinned is erroneous, and that the verse is not to be taken literally, it is clear that there was some wrongdoing. This is explicitly clear from Yaakov's "blessing" to Reuven at the end of his life, "Because you went up to your father's bed and defiled it" (49:4). Whatever Reuven did, even if the physical action was only the moving of beds (Shabbat 55b, cited by Rashi 35:22), it was perceived by Yaakov as a rebellion against Yaakov's position as leader of the family. Reuven was undermining Yaakov's role within his own family, violating the basic family boundaries. This shows the beginning of the slow, internal deterioration of the family.

We now arrive at this week's parasha. Yaakov seeks tranquility. He has survived the external threats, and he now wants to concentrate on his family, focusing internally. The episodes with Dina and Reuven were disruptive, but Yaakov still retains his dream for tranquility. But then, "the ordeal of Yosef sprang upon him." The internal deterioration moves to another level with the episode of Yosef and his brothers, and Yaakov is left with frustration and failure.

A question arises regarding the brothers' bringing the coat to Yaakov: why did they have to make it so graphic? Why not just tell Yaakov a story? The Ramban (37:32) explains that they needed to send a bloody coat so that Yaakov would not suspect them of killing Yosef. He explains that since Yaakov was aware of their jealousy, they would have been suspect in the absence of evidence.

Yaakov knew that there were issues between the maidservants' sons and Leah's sons (see Rashi 37:2 s.v. et dibbatam); thus, if they had just made up a story, he would have suspected that they killed him. The deterioration had gone so far that these were the issues that the brothers faced. Yaakov knew that there was

such great animosity within the family that he would have suspected them of killing Yosef!

There is apparently a real deficiency in the education and values within the family. Education needs to be specialized to each element, to each unit and to each individual. It cannot be provided just in terms of the respective classes or groups within the society or the family. Overall, the family is full of problems, both socially and in terms of values. And, overall, there was a lack of unity.

We now understand Yaakov's statement to Pharaoh, "Few and unpleasant have been the days of my life." Yaakov's dream was to be able to settle down and develop his family. But when the external threats ceased, the internal ones began to sprout, disrupting the family from all directions, leading to the ultimate frustration and failure, for Yaakov's modest dream was left unfulfilled. But we cannot claim that the first stage involved external difficulties alone, with internal problems developing only subsequently. At some level, the two are interrelated. Rashi (Devarim 1:3) quotes a Midrash (Sifrei, Devarim 2) which asks why Yaakov did not criticize Reuven at the time; why did he wait until the end of his life? The Midrash's response is astounding. Yaakov did not admonish Reuven earlier because he was afraid that Reuven would abandon Yaakov and join forces with Esav. The external threat comes back to haunt Yaakov, as a result of the internal deterioration. The problems are both internal and external, with the issues intertwined.

In our country of Israel, we are all seeking tranquility and praying for it. But the issue then arises regarding our internal problems. If we cannot maintain our internal peace, then it will all be for naught. Furthermore, the internal problems will bring the external threats back once more, as the Midrash states regarding Yaakov and Reuven. It is our job, then, to ensure that the internal threats are stopped, to ensure that tranquility will reign internally. And in doing so, we can fulfill the wish of our patriarch Yaakov, who sought to live in peace and tranquility. [*Originally delivered on leil Shabbat, parashat Vayeshev 5762 (2001).*]

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Vayeshev relates a seemingly disturbing series of events. After telling us that Yosef snatched on his brothers, it says that Yaakov loved Yosef more than all the other brothers and that's why he made him a striped shirt. Then it says of the brothers could no longer tolerate Yosef, and didn't believe his dreams of them bowing to him. First, why did Yaakov love one son more than the others? Second, why couldn't the brothers tolerate Yosef only after his father made him the striped shirt? Lastly, why did Yosef insist on telling his brothers his dreams, when he must have sensed that they didn't want to hear them? Rav

Kaminetsky explains that Yaakov had taught Yosef all that he'd learned in the Yeshiva (school) of Shem and Eiver where he studied, and where Yitzchok and Avraham studied as well. The main strength of that school was that they taught Torah that could survive in negative environments. Avraham used it to deal with the rest of the world, Yitzchok used it to deal with Yishmael, and Yaakov used it to deal with Lavan and Esav. Now Yaakov was teaching it to Yosef, and the brothers were worried. Were they as bad as Esav or Lavan? Why would Yaakov have to teach Yosef that Torah? Little did they know that Yosef would need it to deal with Egypt, and all the trials he would face there.

Yaakov loved Yosef more because he learned more, and wanted the other brothers to be jealous (that's why he made him the shirt), so that they'd want to learn it too. But instead they became jealous for the wrong reasons. It was then that Yosef tried to tell them that they shouldn't be jealous, because he had to learn for his own sake, because he'd have to be a leader in a foreign land (as the dreams with stalks suggested, since there were no stalks where they lived). But the brothers had let themselves be blinded by hate, and couldn't see the truth, as obvious as it may have been.

There's an important lesson in all of this: jealousy can be used in a good way, as Yaakov tried to do. However, if we're not careful, we could miss the whole point, and end up doing things we shouldn't. The first test is to ask ourselves if we want something because we need it, or simply because someone else has it. We should be jealous of things we can learn and grow from, like Torah knowledge, good character traits, and even courage and persistence. Everyone has qualities we can and should be jealous of, as long as we use it not to prove ourselves, but to improve ourselves. © 2013 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

When providing the background for the tension between Yosef and his brothers, the Torah (B'reishis 37:2-11) tells us the following: (1) Yosef was 17 years old; (2) he shepherded the flocks with his brothers; (3) he was more intimately involved with the children of Bilhah and Zilpah than with his other brothers; (4) he brought their ill tidings to their father (although it is unclear whether it was the ill tidings of the half-brothers just referred to or all of his half-brothers, without any other identifier the pronoun should refer only to the previously mentioned brothers); (5) Yaakov (nee Yisroel) loved Yosef more than all the other brothers; (6) this extra love is attributed to Yosef being his "ben z'kunim," which Rashi says could refer to Yaakov's advanced age, to Yosef's wisdom, or to Yosef's appearance being similar to Yaakov's; (7) Yaakov made Yosef a special garment; (8) the brothers "hated" Yosef because of the extra love Yaakov had for

him; (9) the brothers hated him more after Yosef told them his first dream; (10) the brothers became jealous of him after hearing the second dream.

Although some of these points, such as Yosef's age, could just be a point of reference (his age may also have been mentioned to indicate some immaturity), the details provided, and the way they are provided, raises several issues. First of all, there is no indication in the text that Yosef bringing the ill tidings caused tension (or at least was the initial cause of the tension, see Rashi on 37:8). If it was a factor, why does the Torah say the cause of the hatred was Yaakov's extra love for Yosef? If it wasn't, why is it even mentioned in the narrative? The way the "ill tidings" are described seems strange as well, as the word "dibah" itself indicates that the tidings had a negative connotation (see Ramban), making the adjective "ill" superfluous. And if "ill tidings" refers to "things they did that were bad," it should have been "tidings of their bad doings" ("dibas ra'asam") rather than "their tidings that were bad" ("dibasam ra'ah"). As some commentators point out, it seems peculiar for the Torah to call Yaakov "their father" (37:2) rather than "his father," especially after calling him "his father" earlier in the verse. Also, why is Yaakov called "Yisroel" if the focus is his relationship with his sons and their relationship with each other? True, the consequences of the family dynamic had national implications, but isn't that true of everything related in the Torah? Additionally, why did the first dream bring about extra hatred, and the second make the brothers jealous? Finally, since his brothers already hated him, why did Yosef make things worse by sharing his dreams with them at all?

Chasam Sofer, discussing the term "ill tidings," says that Yosef didn't tell Yaakov what his brothers had done wrong, only what the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah were saying about Leah's sons. Leah's sons treated the others as if they were servants, not full sons of Yaakov, which led the mistreated sons to complain (to each other) about how they were treated as well as about Yaakov not correcting their brothers. (If we want to include the Midrash quoted by Rashi, we can extend this to include complaining to each other about the eating habits of Leah's sons, etc.) Yosef "brought their ill tidings" i.e. that they were complaining, to Yaakov's attention. Without the added adjective, there would be no way of knowing whether Yosef told Yaakov what his brothers had done, or had told him that they were complaining about what their brothers were doing; now that the adjective is used and the word "their" is attached to the word "tidings" rather than to the word "bad," we know that it was the complaining that Yosef told Yaakov about. Nevertheless, this doesn't explain why it matters that Yosef told Yaakov what one set of brothers were complaining about rather than just telling him what (some of) his brothers had done wrong.

Being that Yosef was not much younger than his older brothers (they were all born within the seven years between Yaakov's marriage and Yosef's birth) it is

difficult to say that the term "ben z'kunim" refers to Yaakov's age. Since we are told of Yaakov's extra love for Yosef immediately after being told about the "ill tidings," it is fair to connect them, and by extension, the term "ben z'kunim." I would suggest that Yosef told Yaakov what his brothers were complaining about because they were the sons of "his father's wives," i.e. they were all part of the same family, and he was concerned about the fissure that was developing between the sons of one of his father's wives and the sons of his other wives. In order to try to create unity within the family, Yosef had to tell Yaakov what the complaints were, bringing them to "their father," i.e. focusing on their relationship with him. Yaakov appreciated Yosef's ability to see the bigger picture, being concerned with how the complaints affected the family rather than just on the complaints themselves. This "wise perspective" indicated that Yosef had leadership abilities, and brought about Yaakov's extra love. The Torah refers to Yaakov as "Yisroel" because Yaakov was thinking about Yosef's role as a leader, not just as a brother, which fit with Yaakov's perception that his children from Rachel would become the primary part of the emerging nation while the others played a supporting role. The special garment that Yaakov gave Yosef symbolized Yosef's newly recognized leadership position.

Seeing that Yaakov loved Yosef more than them didn't sit well with the brothers. It is unclear whether they thought the special garment was just a token of Yaakov's extra love or a symbol of Yosef being given a leadership position, but either one couldn't have sat well with them either. Yosef thought that his dream verified his belonging in a leadership position, and that sharing it with his brothers would help them realize it too. Obviously, that backfired, as rather than accepting Yosef as their leader, they hated him even more. After his second dream, Yosef tried again, this time including their father so that Yaakov could back up his assertion that the dreams indicated that Yosef was destined to be a leader. Although Yaakov didn't dismiss the notion of Yosef being a leader (especially since he thought he would be), he did protest against the dream on technical grounds (the moon being unable to represent Yosef's mother since she was no longer alive). For the brothers, though, the takeaway was not that Yaakov dismissed the dream, but that he didn't dismiss the idea that Yosef would be their leader, lending the notion credence and causing their hatred to become jealousy. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftarah

This week's haftarah sensitizes us to the severity of injustice. The prophet Amos begins by informing us of the limits of Hashem's tolerance. Hashem says, "I can be patient over the three offenses of the Jewish

people, but the fourth is inexcusable. Namely, the sale of the righteous for silver and the pauper for shoes. They anticipate the dirt placed on the head of the impoverished." (2:6, 7) Amos admonishes the Jewish people here for their insensitivity towards injustice. He complains about the judges who would bend the law for nominal sums and exchange justice for an inexpensive pair of shoes. They would discriminate against the poor and even drag the impoverished through the dirt when they refused to comply with their unjustified sentence. Over these Hashem expresses serious disturbance and declares them unforgivable.

The Radak, in explanation of the above passages, magnifies this disturbance and interprets the three offenses mentioned here to be the three cardinal sins -- idolatry, incest and murder. Hashem explains that the most cardinal sins do not receive an immediate response from Above. For these Hashem is somewhat patient and allows the offender the opportunity to repent and correct his outrageous behavior. But the injustice shown to the poor evokes Hashem's immediate response. Rabbeinu Bachya (see introduction to our Parsha) explains the basis for this and reminds us that the poor place their total trust in Hashem. Their financial resources do not command any respect or assistance from others which forces them to place their total trust in Hashem. Therefore, Hashem pledges to come immediately to their defense and responds harshly to any injustice done to them.

The Pirkei D'Reb Eliezer (Chapter 38) sees in the above passages a reference to the infamous sale of Yoseif Hatzaddik by his brothers, the tribes of Israel. Chazal explain that the brothers sold Yoseif for the equivalent of twenty silver dollars and that each brother purchased a pair of shoes with his portion of the money, two silver dollars. According to R' Eliezer, this is the incident Amos refers to when reprimanding the Jewish people for selling the righteous for silver and the pauper for shoes. The prophet tells us that this sin was unforgivable and was viewed with greater severity than every cardinal offense. With this statement the prophet alludes to the fact that the greatest scholars of Israel, the ten holy martyrs would be brutally murdered in atonement for this sin. Hashem said that the sale of Yoseif, unlike all other sins, could never be overlooked and that one day the greatest Tannaim (Mishnaic authors) would suffer inhuman torture and be taken from us in atonement for this sin. No offense of the Jewish people ever evoked a response so harsh as this one and the torturous death of the ten martyrs remains the most tragic personal event in all of Jewish history.

This week's haftorah shares with us an important perspective regarding the offense of Yoseif's sale by focusing on a particular aspect of the offense. As we glean from the prophet's words it was not the actual sale that aroused Hashem's wrath, rather the condition of the sale. Amos refers to the indignity shown to Yoseif and the insensitivity towards his feelings,

being sold for an inexpensive pair of shoes. When lamenting the ten martyrs during the liturgy in the Yom Kippur service we accent this dimension and recount that the wicked Roman ruler filled the entire courtroom with shoes. This was his fiendish way of reminding the martyrs about their indignant behavior and insensitivity towards their brother.

The upshot of this is that there was some room to justify the actual sale of Yoseif. The Sforno (37:18) explains that the brothers truly perceived that their life was in serious danger as long as Yoseif remained in their surroundings. After closely following his actions and anticipating the outcome of his inexcusable attitude and behavior the brothers found it necessary to protect themselves from his inevitable attack of them. Although they totally misread the entire situation from the start it can be argued that their precautionary measures were somewhat justified and permissible. However, Sforno draws our attention to their insensitivity during these trying moments. The brothers are quoted to have reflected on their decision and said, "But we are guilty for observing his pain when he pleaded with us and we turned a deaf ear to it." (Breishis 42:21) Even they faulted themselves for their insensitivity towards their brother. When he pleaded for his life they should have reconsidered and adjusted their harsh decision. It is this insensitivity that the prophet refers to when focusing upon the sale for shoes. Apparently, they purchased these shoes in exchange for Yoseif to indicate that he deserved to be reduced to dirt. Their statement reflected that whoever challenged their authority deserved to be leveled and reduced to nothing. (see Radal to Pirkei D'R'Eliezer)

This expression of indignation was inexcusable and required the most severe of responses. Hashem chose the illustrious era of the Tannaim to respond to this offense. During those times a quorum of prominent scholars presided over Israel which personified the lessons of brotherhood and sensitivity. An elite group was chosen for the task, including: the Prince of Israel, the High Priest and Rabbi Akiva who authored the statement, "Love your friend as yourself" is the fundamental principle of the Torah." In atonement for the inexcusable sale Hashem decreed upon these martyrs the most insensitive torturous death ever to be experienced. The Tzor Hamor (see Seder Hadoros year 3880) explains that the lesson this taught the Jewish people was eternal. After this horrifying experience the Jewish people were finally cleansed from all effects of the infamous offense done to Yoseif. From hereafter they could be authentically identified as a caring and sensitive people. From this we learn how sensitive we must be and even when our harsh actions are justified we must exercise them with proper sensitivities. As difficult as the balance may be we must always feel for our Jewish brethren and show them the proper dignity and compassion they truly deserve. © 2013 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org