

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of Feige Bas Meyer.
"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VAYEISHEV

For The Love of G-d

And they sent the Kesones Pasim (Yosef's coat), and they brought it to their father; and said, this have we found; do you recognize whether or not it is your son's coat? And he (Yaakov) recognized it and said, it is my son's coat; an evil beast has devoured him; Yosef is without doubt torn in pieces (37:32-33).

The brothers of Yosef, having sold him into slavery, devise a ruse to mislead their father and explain Yosef's "disappearance." They stripped him of the unique coat gifted to him by his father and dipped it into the blood of a male goat (which according to Rashi 37:31 is similar to human blood). Yaakov recognizes the bloody coat and comes to the (mistaken) conclusion that Yosef has been attacked by a wild animal.

Rashi (37:33) informs us that Yaakov unknowingly made a prophetic statement. The "wild animal" that Yaakov assumes attacked his son actually refers to the wife of Potiphar who would later in the *parsha* (39:7-16) actually "attack" Yosef; literally grabbing him in an attempt to force him to be with her. Potiphar's wife is thus referred to as a "wild animal."

Yet, paradoxically, Rashi (39:1) explains that the Torah juxtaposes the story of Potiphar's wife with that of Tamar (the righteous daughter-in-law of Yehuda who deceives him into impregnating her) to teach us that both of these women acted *L'shem Shomayim* – "for the sake of heaven." In other words, both righteous Tamar and the wife of Potiphar were trying to do the right thing for the sake of Hashem. If this is true, how can Potiphar's wife be called a wild animal?

Understanding why we do what we do – the motivations behind our actions – is a very complicated process. By way of example: Korach, who created a painful rift in Bnei Yisroel by contesting Moshe's

authority, could have easily deluded himself to believe that he was acting for the sake of Hashem. After all he had a multitude of "complaints" against Moshe and Aharon. In fact, Chazal teach us that Korach was a great man; he must have at least convinced *himself* that his cause was just. However, the Mishna uses Korach as the quintessential example of an argument that is not "for the sake of heaven." Rashi explains that Korach lacked self-understanding because he was driven not by the worthiness of his cause, but rather by jealousy.

But still, Chazal certify that Potiphar's wife **did in fact** "act for the sake of heaven." How is it possible to act with the right intention and yet still do the wrong thing? The Torah is teaching us an incredible life lesson, one that should reverberate in our mind whenever we are trying to figure out what is the right thing to do.

In every relationship, there comes a time when we want to do something for our beloved, even if we are unsure whether it's something they desire. We are so convinced that it is good for them that we neglect the essential foundation of the relationship – respect. In other words, if I do something with the right intention but against the wishes of the person I am supposedly doing it for, I may love them but I don't respect them. Real love is built first and foremost on respect; otherwise the love is unbalanced and self-centered.

Potiphar's wife was trying to do something for Hashem, but she neglected



to ask the most important question; is this what Hashem really wants? Am I supposed to act in an adulterous manner and force Yosef into doing something that he feels is wrong? If she had honestly asked herself those questions she would have known that while her intentions were proper, the act was absolutely wrong and abusive. She is therefore likened to a "wild animal."

Analogous to this are the movements that decided to "improve" on the traditional Halachic Judaism. Without a doubt, when they decided to bring "innovation" to the synagogue, like incorporating music into the service, encouraging families to sit together, moving the service to Sunday, and permitting driving to shul on Shabbos, their intentions were, undoubtedly, "for the sake of heaven." Clearly, they felt that their "innovations" would enhance the synagogue experience and attendance.

But they forgot the critical question; is this really what Hashem wants? Is this what the synagogue experience was destined to be? Does Hashem want us to violate Shabbos or other Torah laws to improve the synagogue experience? Sadly, had they looked at the question honestly they would have had to answer "no." This lack of vision led to the disappearance of many Jewish communities and to the assimilation of many millions of Jews. We have to always remember that doing something out of love requires us to first ask, "What does our beloved want?"

Earning Entitlements

And he (Yosef) said to them, "Hear this dream which I have dreamed" [...] And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us, shall you indeed have dominion over us?" And they hated him even more for his dreams, and for his words (37:6-8).

The brothers' reaction to Yosef is difficult to understand. Why would their reaction to him be one of hatred? After all, there are only two options: 1) The dreams are true and Yosef will indeed rule over them and they owe him their loyalty and obedience or 2) His "dreams" are the rantings of a delusional person with a megalomaniacal complex and they should be making an appointment for him with the local psychiatrist while feeling sorry for him. In either case, their resentment of him hardly seems to be the appropriate reaction. How are we to understand their resentment?

Dreams are, in fact, a method by which Hashem reveals what events may come to pass. Similar to prophecy, dreams come in a sleep state and can predict the future. The difference between the two is that prophecies, particularly positive ones, will absolutely come to pass. Dreams merely describe a possibility of what **may** happen.

The difference between them is, as Rashi (37:10) points out, "There is no dream without some senseless matters in it." In other words, the way to tell the difference between a dream and a prophecy is that a dream contains something that is certainly not possible to happen.

Yosef presumed the dreams to be an indication of his leadership. Yaakov had already given him a royal tunic and his dreams, in his mind, confirmed that he was going to be their king. He therefore assumed an air of superiority over them. The brothers did in fact understand that the dreams were a portent of what might come to be; but they felt that Yosef had done nothing to deserve a leadership role. In their minds, Yosef had to earn the right to their fealty, and his ascension without any actual merit merely fueled their resentment. While it may be true that some day he could become their leader, they felt he needed to earn the title.

In our society we also make the same mistake. Students are often lauded for achievements earned not by hard work, but rather because they were gifted by Hashem with superior intellect. We often overlook the hardworking student who overcame many obstacles to achieve a high grade yet is all but ignored because his grade was half a point lower than first place. In fact, much of society's obsession with famous "stars" is an idolization of a G-d-given unique ability (e.g. natural beauty) not personal achievement. This is, obviously, a terrible mistake because it reinforces the artificial perception of what achievement is, and also discourages the ethic of striving for personal growth.

The brothers' message to Yosef was that leadership isn't a divine right. While it is true you have to have the innate ability for leadership, it doesn't get bestowed upon you until you earn it.

Did You Know...

In this week's *parsha* Yaakov makes a special coat for Yosef, the *kesones pasim*, which in turn makes his brothers jealous. This special coat was the first volley in a fight that would lead to Yaakov and his children going down to Egypt. Though not much is said about it, here are some interesting facts you might not have known about Yosef's special coat:

1. There's an opinion that it was a royal garment (2 *Shmuel* 13:18; Ralbag ad loc).
2. There are several explanations for what "*passim*" means, including colorful. The sleeves also reached Yosef's palms (Pas Yad in Hebrew), this is significant because only important, privileged people wore these type of clothes as they indicated that the wearer didn't have to do physical work. It also may mean embroidered, striped, or with pictures.
3. The name could also possibly refer to the material with which it was made, probably fine wool. The finest wool comes from Kashmir (hence the word Cashmere) and it seems likely that the word "*pasim*" is related to pashmina (a fine type of cashmere wool); today often used to make fine scarves for women. The name is originally Persian: *pašmina*, meaning "made from wool."
4. Alternatively, it was called this because it was exceptionally light and thin and could be folded into the palm of a hand (*Bereishis Rabbah* 84).
5. The Medresh teaches that not only did the brothers remove his coat when they threw him into the pit, but they also removed all of his clothes.



4000 Alton Road
Miami Beach, FL 33140

To dedicate an issue of Insights please email:
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