

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Gloria Bierman's Mother, Esther Bas Yosef. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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28 KISLEV

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS MIKEITZ

Bargaining Cup

He searched; he began with the oldest and ended with the youngest; the goblet was found in Binyamin's sack (44:12).

At the end of this week's *parsha*, as the brothers are finally permitted to leave and return to Eretz Yisroel laden with the food they had acquired in Mitzrayim, Yosef sabotages them by having his silver cup of divination placed surreptitiously in Binyamin's sack. He then has the brothers pursued and accused of stealing his special goblet.

The brothers vehemently deny the accusation and point out that they had even returned the money that they had found in their sack from the previous trip. They conclude with: *"Anyone among your servants that the goblet is found shall be put to death and the rest of us will be slaves to our master"* (44:9).

Once the goblet is found in Binyamin's sack the brothers were beside themselves. They began yelling at Binyamin "you're a thief, the son of a thief!" – referring to the fact that his mother Rochel stole the idols from her father Lavan when they snuck away and left Charan (See *Midrash Tanchuma* and *Bereishis Rabbah* ad loc).

However, this characterization requires some understanding. Being a thief isn't part of one's DNA – a gene that is passed down from a parent. At most, it is a learned outcome from growing up in a certain environment. But Binyamin never spent any time with his mother because she died in childbirth. What does his taking of the goblet have to do with his mother taking Lavan's idols?

Furthermore, it isn't just Rochel that is accused of stealing, his father Yaakov was

accused of stealing the *brachos* belonging to Eisav and the Torah actually says that Yaakov "stole" the heart of Lavan (31:20). Why are they associating Binyamin's supposed thievery as emanating solely from his mother?

The commentaries attempt to explain why in fact Rochel actually took her father's idols. Rashi (31:19) explains that she wanted to separate Lavan from idol worship (31:19). But this is incomplete at best. If Rochel's sole intent was to remove her father from the idols, why didn't she just dispose of them the minute they were far enough away? She could have easily tossed them over the first bridge she came across and no one would have been the wiser. Why did she hold on to them?

Lavan had mercilessly persecuted Yaakov, and Rochel and Leah even felt mistreated by their father, who basically sold them for Yaakov in exchange for years of labor. In fact, Lavan, upon catching up to them, exclaims that had G-d not appeared to him the night before he would have harmed them, and in the Haggadah we actually say that he tried to destroy Yaakov. Rochel knew how precious the idols were to her father, and thus seems to have taken his idols as leverage should he ever threaten them again.

So too Binyamin, ostensibly, could have been perceived as taking Yosef's special goblet of divination as a future bargaining chip. After all, every time the brothers came down to buy food Yosef persecuted them; cross examining them, calling them liars, and even taking a hostage. It would



have been natural for one of them to consider how to ensure that their future food purchases would go a little more smoothly. By taking away his goblet of divination, Binyamin could have gotten a measure of leverage over Yosef, just as his mother had done to her father. This is the narrative that Yosef tried to portray, and the brothers fell for it, blaming Binyamin for being like his mother.

In tribute to the tenth Yahrzeit of Binyamin (Barry) Ross OBM, and as continuing Zechus for R' Binyomin Yitzchak Ben Meir Z'L, the Ross family is sponsoring a free class every week for the entire year.

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All for One and One for All

We are ready to be slaves to my lord, both we and the one in whose hand the goblet was found (44:16).

When the brothers were tracked down and confronted with the accusation of stealing Yosef's silver goblet, they were aghast and exclaimed; *"The one among your servants with whom it is found shall die and we also will become slaves to my lord"* (44:9). But their offer is rejected as being too much: *"He replied even now, as you say so it is; the one with whom it is found shall be a slave, but the rest of you shall be exonerated"* (44:10).

Sure enough, after the goblet was found in Binyamin's sack and they return to stand in front of Yosef, they make Yosef the same offer; *"Here we are, we are ready to be slaves to my lord, both we and the one in whose hand the goblet was found"* (44:16). But Yosef reiterates his position *"it would be unseemly for me to do this, the man in whose possession the goblet was found, he shall be my slave, and as for the rest of you – go up in peace to your father"* (44:17).

This confrontation, and Yosef's response, leads to the epic showdown between Yehuda and Yosef. Yosef wants to punish only Binyamin with servitude while, allowing the rest of the brothers the freedom to go.

However, Yehuda's response to Binyamin's predicament is hard to fathom. Why does he offer up all of the other brothers to be slaves as well? As devastating as it would be for Yaakov to lose Binyamin to slavery in Egypt, it would be tenfold more painful to lose ALL of his sons to the same fate! What

could Yehuda possibly be thinking?

It must be that Yehuda was offering Yosef a compromise of sorts: Yehuda seems to be offering Yosef the amount of years of slavery he could expect to get from Binyamin, but divided amongst him and the rest of the brothers so that they could work off the debt more quickly together. This appears to be a more than fair deal; after all, the brothers were a formidable group. They would be far more useful as slaves in service than just their smaller and younger brother.

This offer is also the beginning of Yehuda and his brothers owning up to the responsibility of abandoning a brother to an unknown fate. After all, they had all conspired in the selling of Yosef as a slave. Standing up for Binyamin was an indication that they had understood their previous mistake and were unwilling to once again allow a brother to suffer the consequences of his own foolish actions.

In their minds, Binyamin had committed a heinous crime, one with severe consequences. Still, they joined as a brotherhood to try to bail him out of his mistake with an offer that calls for great personal self sacrifice – many years of slavery. Yosef finally sees that his brothers have really changed and this leads to his showdown with Yehuda and his ultimate revelation as their long lost brother.

Did You Know...

Chanukah Edition

1. The original war between the Chashmonaim and the Seleucid Greeks lasted three years before the Maccabees recaptured Yerushalayim and purified the Beis Hamikdash. In all, it took more than another two decades for the Maccabees to force the Seleucids to retreat from Eretz Yisroel.
2. Chanukah wasn't the only significant event that happened on the 25th of Kislev: All the work for the Mishkan was finished on the 25th of Kislev (but it wasn't inaugurated until the first of Nissan).
3. The foundation laying of the second Beis Hamikdash was on the 24th of Kislev and the celebration began that evening (the 25th of Kislev).
4. The 25th word in the Torah is "or" (light).
5. The 25th place that the Jewish people camped while journeying through the desert was called Chashmonah.
6. Maimonides (*Hilchos Chanukah* 4:12) says, "The *mitzvah* of lighting Chanukah candles is extremely beloved...Even if one is getting his food as a charity, he must borrow or sell his clothes in order to acquire oil and wicks to fulfill his obligation."
7. Chanukah is known as the festival of lights. Maimonides (*ibid* 4:14) states that light in a home promotes *shalom* and that the entire Torah was given in order to create peace in the world.
8. The vigilantly observed custom to eat fried foods (*sufganiyot*, *latkes*, etc.) to commemorate the miracle of the oil isn't exactly "diet friendly." The average *sufganiyah* (doughnut) packs 400-600 calories and one potato *latke* has about 150 calories. Israelis devour some 24 million *sufganiyot* during the eight-day holiday – adding up to 10.8 billion calories.



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