

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of Leon Brickman.
"May his Neshama have an Aliya."

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VAYEISHEV

Transmitting a Double Legacy

Now Yisroel loved Yosef more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age (ben zekunim); and he made him a kesones pasim... (37:3)

Rashi (ad loc), based on the Targum and Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 84:7), explains that *ben zekunim* refers to the fact that "Yaakov taught Yosef all the Torah he learned in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever" (the word *zekunim* being a reference to the two *zekanim* – elders).

That Yaakov emphasized these teachings to Yosef is somewhat difficult to understand. Maimonides (*Hilchos Avodah Zara* 1:3) says that while Yaakov taught all his children, the one he appointed to head his Yeshiva was Levi. In other words, Levi was entrusted with the transmission of all the Torah and its values that began with Avraham. In *Parshas Vayigash* (46:28), Rashi points out that Yehuda was charged with building the Yeshiva (read "fundraiser"), but Levi was clearly the *Rosh HaYeshiva*. What then, was Yosef's role that it necessitated him knowing all the Torah of Shem and Ever? Moreover, what in fact was studied in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever?

The answer is that the children of Yaakov had two curriculums in their Torah studies. These curriculums were patterned after the two roles of Yaakov Avinu – that of Yaakov and that of Yisroel. In the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever he studied the seven Noachide laws and all their subsets and applications. The seven Noachide laws are for the average non-Jew to know their responsibilities to fulfill in this world. This was a very large body of work to study and took many decades to study and master. As an example; one of the seven Noachide laws is the prohibition on idol worship. In the times of Avraham,

the tractate of *Avodah Zara* (idol worship) had four hundred chapters (*Gemara Avodah Zara* 14b) while today ours only has five. The second curriculum was that of the 613 *mitzvos*.

Yaakov had two roles that he fulfilled and they are represented by his two names; Yaakov and Yisroel. Originally, Yitzchak Avinu had envisioned a Jewish nation as a partnership between Eisav and Yaakov – Eisav would handle the physical world and physical needs, including interfacing with the other nations of the world, while Yaakov would be the spiritual source of Torah and Jewish values. This all changed when Yaakov received Eisav's *bracha* from Yitzchak. When Eisav's archangel was defeated and conceded that his birthright entitled him to the *brachos*, Eisav's angel gives him his second name – Yisroel.

As Yaakov, he was charged with the transmission of the Torah and the values of Avraham Avinu. This is the very essence of *Klal Yisroel* and that role was passed on to Levi as *Rosh HaYeshiva* and final authority on Jewish law and custom. As Yisroel, he represented the leadership of *Klal Yisroel* as it relates to the other nations of the world; the responsibility to help them recognize Hashem and bring morality and international peace to them. This second role he gave to Yosef, that of international ambassador for the Jewish people. To fill that role Yosef had to be fully versed in the teachings of Shem and Ever and that is why Yaakov made it the focus of Yosef's studies.



And they sent the kesones pasim, 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).

Rashi (37:33) says that Yaakov unknowingly spoke prophetically. Because although Yosef was still alive, an "evil beast" refers to the wife of Potiphar, into whose clutches he would eventually fall. Potiphar's wife would come to lust after him and after refusing her multiple times she would falsely accuse him of attacking her and send him to prison.

Yet Rashi (39:1) says that the Torah puts the story of Yosef going down to Egypt next to the story of Yehuda and Tamar to teach us that just as Tamar was a righteous woman and acted for the sake of heaven (having decided that she would rather be put to death than embarrass Yehuda publicly) so too the wife of Potiphar acted for the sake of heaven for she foresaw that her descendants would be from Yosef.

How is it possible that a person who is acting for the sake of heaven can be referred to as an "evil beast" for that act?

Becoming Mainstream

These are the generations of Yaakov; Yosef, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives (37:2).

The Torah makes a remarkable statement here. Until this time Bilhah and Zilpah had been either called "maidservants" or "concubines." This is the first place they are referred to as the "wives" of Yaakov. The difference is self-evident; a child of a servant is a servant while the child of a wife is considered a full sibling to all the children in the family. In the *posuk*, the sons of Bilah and Zilpah are referred to as Yosef's "brothers." Clearly, Yosef had elevated the status of the children of Bilhah and Zilpah to brothers (in part by considering their mothers "wives of his father"). This would explain what our rabbis teach - that Yosef was so vexed that his brothers from Leah were calling them "slaves" that he complained to his father (see Rashi ad loc).

Given that Yosef had gone out of his way to validate their lineage, what happens to him later on is seemingly impossible to believe. The *Midrash Tanchuma* (ad loc) relates that **ALL** the brothers were unanimous in the decision to put Yosef to death and according to the Yalkut Shimoni (ad loc), when they changed their mind and sold him instead, **ALL** the brothers took a share of the proceeds from the sale. How is this possible? How could the children of Bilah and Zilpah turn on the one brother who validated them and elevated them to the status of brother?

Chazal are teaching us a fascinating sociological application of human nature. Even after the children of Bilah and Zilpah were validated and

recognized as equal brothers, they were still constantly looking for further validation and wouldn't even consider disagreeing with the children of Leah. In other words, an insecure person will always choose to remain part of the mainstream even if it comes at the expense of the person that opened the door for them in the first place. A common refrain from *kiruv* professionals is that very often the people they have returned to mainstream Orthodox practice refuse to support the very system that enabled them to become religious in the first place because the *kiruv* organization isn't "religious enough." Another example is when families choose schools for their kids based on what community they want to be identified with as opposed to starting with the question; what school is best for this particular child?

This type of behavior points to a serious deficiency in one's character. Fortunately, the solution is fairly simple. Once a person has grown to a new level, he must not look for validation from the outside. This will only lead a person to make poor decisions because these decisions are made primarily on the criteria of what will give him the greatest validation. Instead, he must begin to appreciate internally who he has become and self-validate himself. Only then will he begin making decisions based on what is the right thing to do.

Did You Know...

There was a very interesting medieval custom in some communities to read *Megillas Antiochus* on the Shabbos preceding Chanukah. In Yemen, it was read in shul after the *haftorah* and in Crimea it was read after *mincha*. *Megillas Antiochus*, originally written in Aramaic, is the story of the military victory of the Chashmoniam over the head of the Greek Seleucid Empire, King Antiochus. While in modern times more attention is given to the *Book of Maccabees*, historically, it has not had much acceptance in the broader Jewish community in the last two millennia. This may be in part due to the fact that the original Hebrew version is long gone and only the Greek translation of the *Book of Maccabees* is extant. Though *Megillas Antiochus* is strangely titled (imagine calling *Megillas Esther* - *Megillas Haman*), it is found quite early in *halacha*. The Behag (around 750 CE) mentions it as being written by the elders of *Beis Hillel* and *Beis Shammai* (somewhere around 30 BCE), which predates the destruction of the second *Beis Hamikdash*. Rav Saadia Gaon (around 900 CE) felt that it was originally written even earlier - by the Chashmonaim themselves and held it in such high esteem that he translated it into Arabic to make it widely accessible. He also changed the name to *Megillat Beis Chashmonai*.

We'll end with a very appropriate quote from R. Yaacov Haber, "The lesson of these two main stories (i.e. the miracles of the oil and that of the military victory) is that a little bit of purity can go a very long way. It is not the quantity of the oil that matters; it is the quality of its purity. The greatest developments in world history did not take place because of large armies or mega corporations. Change for the better is effected by individuals with courage and by heroes of faith. It is not the fire power of an army that wins the battle, but the purity, power, and conviction of its cause."



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