

## “Parshat Hashavua- One Text-- Many Voices”

Parshat Vayeshev

Bereishit Perek 37: 2-4

אֵלֶּה | תְּלֻדֹת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף בֶּן־שִׁבְע־עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה הָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת־אֶחָיו בְּצֹאן וְהוּא  
נָעַר אֶת־בְּנֵי בְלָהָה וְאֶת־בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה נְשֵׂי אָבִיו וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־דְּבַרְתָּם רָעָה  
אֶל־אֲבִיהֶם: וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִכָּל־בְּנָיו כִּי־בֶן־זִקְנִים הוּא לוֹ וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ  
כֶּתֶן נֹת פְּסִים: וַיִּרְאוּ אֶחָיו כִּי־אֲתוֹ אֶהָב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אֶחָיו וַיִּשְׁנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ  
דַּבְּרוּ לְשָׁלָם:

These are the generations of Jacob: when Joseph was seventeen years old, being a shepherd, he was with his brothers with the flocks, and he was a lad, [and was] with the sons of Bilhah and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought evil tales about them to their father. And Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was a son of his old age; and he made him a fine woolen coat. And his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, so they hated him, and they could not speak with him peacefully.

### Ariella Ruben- Class of 2021-An original thought

וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִכָּל־בְּנָיו כִּי־בֶן־זִקְנִים הוּא לוֹ וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ כֶּתֶן נֹת פְּסִים:  
And Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was a son of his old age;  
and he made him a fine woolen coat.

There is one question I have regarding the above phrase and translation: what is meant by the phrase “he was a son of his old age”? Well, for starters, the phrase “a son of his old age” (כִּי־בֶן־זִקְנִים) could simply mean that Joseph was wise for his age, or that Jacob put special care into his education as opposed to his other sons, who worked the fields all day; however, I would prefer to read it as that, when considering the chronology of Jacob's children's births, he would objectively have been at his oldest when Joseph and Benjamin were born. As such, he would have presumably been used to the whole parenting thing by then and could have applied all of what he had learned from 10 other sons worth of parenting plunders to Joseph and really raise the perfect child. Of course, Joseph is not perfect, but what pride Jacob probably took in raising Rachel's son would probably have left him blind to what flaws were more apparent to the guinea pig sons.

### **Jake Teller- Class of 2021- Rashi: “Ben Zekunim”**

These pesukim at the very beginning of the Parsha discuss the actions of Yosef as a young man. When he was seventeen years old, Yosef would “shepard” his brothers and tell negative stories about them to their father. The Torah then mentions that Yosef was Yaakov’s favorite child and he made a multi-colored coat for him, and all of the other brothers saw that and were very envious of that relationship.

The Torah mentions that Yosef was Yaakov’s favorite because “he is the child of his old age.” **Rashi** (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki), who lived in the 11th century in France, asks the question, what exactly does it mean that Yosef is the child of his old age? He gives two answers to this question. The first one is that he is old because of his knowledge; that he is wise from the Shem and Ever Yeshiva that he attended. His second answer is that Yosef is Yaakov’s son of his old age because he simply resembled him in the physical sense, as in they looked like each other. This similarity led Yaakov to favor the one that looked like himself over the rest of his sons.

### **Avidan Abramson- Class of 2023: Alshich- “Joseph- a true brother to all”**

The three verses in Genesis 37:2-4 initially seem very uneventful and void of any explanation. It seems pretty straightforward. Joseph was a young man, he would shepherd his father’s flocks, tattle on his brothers, and get special treatment from his father, Jacob (i.e his ornamented tunic). They certainly seem to be lacking any political statements. However, upon further inspection, these pesukim reveal much more than meets the eye. **Rabbi Moshe Alshich (1508-1593, Turkey/Israel)** notices something very peculiar in pasuk 2. He asks, what is the significance of mentioning the fact that Joseph would be a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, the sons of Ya’akov? Why the double description? Surely saying either one by itself would suffice as enough explanation.

The answer that Rabbi Alshich gives is not one that many would think of. He suggests that the reason for this extra description of Bilhah and Zilpah’s sons is to portray Joseph’s political views. The fact that the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah are not only specifically mentioned as such, but are also referred to as the sons of the wives of Jacob demonstrates Joseph’s tendency to honor and respect even the lowest of the household: the sons born to the handmaids. Using this extra description, the torah highlights the fact that, in Joseph’s eyes, the children of Bilhah and Zilpah were seen as equals to himself. Ironically though, in his honor and respect of these lowly members of the household, Joseph lowers himself. As the son of Jacob’s favorite wife, Rachel, Joseph would never be expected to respect his half brothers as is implied in these pesukim.

This commentary is an excellent example of how sometimes, the Torah does not only mean something different from what is seemingly apparent but sometimes means the complete

opposite. In this case specifically, these pesukim seem to be implying that Joseph was very arrogant and haughty in his treatment of his brothers, but, upon closer investigation, these pesukim demonstrate the exact opposite and show Joseph's respect when it came to his brothers.

### **Rabbi Alex Israel- Modern Israeli Torah Scholar:**

#### **His brothers ... hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.**

Rav Hirsch explains: "They couldn't tolerate his friendly approach to them. In a place of affection, all is straightforward. But when tensions are fraught, one becomes sensitive and reactive and critical of everything... all the more so, when the other side is trying to express amicability." Although Joseph tries to apologize, to make conciliatory gestures, paradoxically, the very attempts to repair the hate deepen it. The brothers aren't open to hearing his peaceful overtures, his words merely exacerbate the resentment.

They cannot hear him! Here we have not only hatred and deep hostility but an absolute breakdown of communication

Can we relate this to our times today? Does this story help us understand why our public discourse has become so toxic? Can you think of one thing that may be done to reduce tensions between divergent and opposing sectors in society?

( based on an excerpt from Rabbi Israel's weekly parsha discussion)

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