

אברהם
ישראל

פרשת וישב Parshat Vayeishev

אשרינו | Ashreinu

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION



WHERE IS YOUR HOME?

RABBI PERETZ LAINE

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AKIVA ROSENTHAL ('20)

MORDECHAI SHEKHTER ('20)

ADINA EISENMAN ('22)

TALIA STAUBER ('20)

We recite Ashrei three times a day. There are not a lot of tefilot that we recite with such frequency, thus its message must be very important. We start this tefilah with a seemingly strange pasuk:

אשרי יושבי ביתך

—“praised are those that dwell in the house of the Lord” (Tehilim 84:6). What does it mean to dwell in the house of the Lord? Should we all abandon our homes and live in shul instead?

In last week's Torah portion, Yaakov sends a message to Esav saying: *עם לבן גרתי ואחר עד עתה* —“I have lived with Lavan and I have been delayed until now” (Bereishit 32:5). The term Yaakov used for “I have lived” is the word *גרתי*, the root of which is *גר* —stranger/foreigner. This term is appropriate when someone lives in a foreign land and in a temporary manner. Yaakov, however, lived with Lavan, his father-in-law, in Charan for over 20 years. He

was married there, he fathered twelve children there, so why would he use the term *גרתי*, which connotes stranger/foreigner, and not the term *ישבתי*, which connotes resident/citizen?

Rashi explains that Yaakov used the term *גרתי* whose numerical value is 613 (תרי"ג) in order to tell Esav that he kept the 613 mitzvot while living with Lavan. This explanation seems odd, however. Granted, the word *גרתי* has the same numerical value as the mitzvot, but what is the connection between being a stranger, *גרתי*, and keeping the mitzvot?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that while Yaakov lived with Lavan he spent a lot of time doing business and acquiring worldly possessions. As we see in the following pasuk, Yaakov begins listing his materialistic and worldly accomplishments.

ויהי לי שור וחמור וצאן ועבד ושפחה

“[While I was there, with Lavan,] I acquired oxen, donkeys, flocks, servants, and maids” (32:6). One might think that Yaakov spent all this time with worldly matters because it was his main purpose in life—to make money and get rich. Thus, Yaakov uses the term *גרתי* to describe his experience. Yaakov was saying that although he spent a lot of time with Lavan dealing with worldly matters and ac-

quiring materialistic possessions, this was temporary, it was not his main objective. Accordingly, Rashi is saying that it was through this outlook—גֵּרִי, that Yaakov was able to keep the תִּרְי"ג mitzvot. Although Yaakov spent a large percentage of his time acquiring worldly possessions, he recognized that it was not his main purpose. It was through this outlook that he was able to remain a fully observant Jew (Lekutei Sichot Volume 1 pages 76-85).

In this week's parsha the first pasuk states:

וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִגְוָרֵי אַבְיוֹ

“and Yaakov settled in the land which his father inhabited” (37:1). According to the Kli Yakar, Yaakov wished to settle in a permanent way—יְשִׁיבָה—in the land where his father viewed himself as a stranger—מִגְוָרֵי אַבְיוֹ. Rashi, quoting the Midrash Rabba, says, “that when Yaakov sought to settle in tranquility, Yosef’s anger [against his brothers] sprung upon him,” ultimately resulting in the sale of Yosef to the Egyptians.

What is the connection between Yaakov wishing to settle in the land where his father was a stranger, and Yosef’s sale?

Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin explains that when Yaakov felt permanence in the land where his father felt like a stranger—*galut*, it resulted in the sale of his favorite son Yosef—his values. Prior to his sale, Yosef had very high dreams and aspirations, he dreamt of the sun, moon, and the stars all bowing down to him. When Yaakov wished to feel like a resident in *galut*, Yosef—Yaakov’s favorite son—was sold. Instead of Yosef continuing with his high aspirations, he was left interpreting the dreams of others—Pharaoh’s chief butler. Yosef was using his gifts and talents, not to help himself fulfill his own hopes and dreams, but rather the Egyptian butler’s. What was Yosef’s reward? The parsha finishes by saying that the butler forgot Yosef. When we feel at home in a foreign land, we start dreaming foreign dreams and adopting foreign ideals which results in us being forgotten (L’Torah u’Limoadim pages 69-70).

Therefore we say Ashrei three times a day to remind us that although, like Yaakov, we may spend most of our day in the outside world dealing with worldly matters, it must remain in a manner of גֵּרִי, and although we may not spend most of our day davening and learning we must recognize that the houses of Torah and tefilah are our “home”. With this outlook, we can remain Torah-observant Jews even while dealing with worldly matters. When we remember that we are still in *galut* we do not lose track of our goal—bringing Mashiah and returning to our home in Eretz Yisrael. May we merit the return of our people to our true home in Tzion with the coming of Mashiah speedily in our days.

FAMILY FAMILIARITY

AKIVA ROSENTHAL ('20)

Throughout Sefer Bereishit, pairs of siblings feud to be the most beloved by their parents. Kayin killed his brother Hevel out of jealousy, Yitzchak was favored by Avraham over Yishmael, Yaakov ran from Esav after getting both of his father’s brachot, and in this week’s parsha, we see Yosef distinguish himself from his brothers in his father’s eyes.

Rav Hunter presents the idea of Yosef being considered the fourth forefather due to his similarities to his ancestors. He explains that Yosef acted as a bridge between the Avot and the twelve tribes. Yosef is one of the twelve tribes, but the Torah seems to indicate that Yosef was closer to Hashem because he was more like his ancestors. For example, Yosef had two sons, like the Avot, and his death is mentioned twice, while each brother’s death is only mentioned once. Yosef also played a more central role in continuing the Jewish people than his brothers, which was the task of our forefathers.

Additionally, Yosef showed qualities of each of the Avot. Yosef and Avraham both dealt with famines and went down to Egypt. Yosef was similar to Yitzchak because they both had tremendous faith that Hashem would save them from dangerous situations, like heading to Akeidat Yitzchak and being stuck in jail. Yaakov and Yosef were both relocated due to their brothers’ hatred toward them, and both only reunite with their brothers years later.

This different way to view Yosef is a good reminder that we are not only defined by our parents, children, and siblings, but also by our actions. Yosef teaches us the important lesson to value our lineage and care about passing it along to the next generation.

THINK BEFORE YOU ACT

MORDECHAI SHEKHTER ('20)

In Parshat Vayeishev, there is a peculiar phrase about Yosef’s relationship with his brothers that is interpreted differently by many commentaries.

וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶחָיו כִּי אֶתּוֹ אָהַב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל אֶחָיו

וַיִּשְׁנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַבָּרוֹ לְשָׁלָם

“And the brothers saw that he was loved by their father and they hated him and could not speak to him peace-

fully” (Bereishit 37:4).

Our mefarshim translate and explain the end of this pasuk in diverse ways. According to Rashi, this interesting wording of the pasuk is present to show that the brothers had redeemable qualities amidst their mistreatment of their brother Yosef. Rashi explains that this wording tells us that although the brothers were mean to Yosef, at least they were true to what they felt in their hearts and were not “two-faced” by pretending to speak to Yosef nicely.

The Sforno gives another interpretation. Even though the brothers had to speak to Yosef regarding matters of the household and shepherding, when Yosef was carrying out the commandment of his father to check on his brothers, they were unable to speak with him peacefully and with camaraderie like brothers should act.

The interpretation of the Netziv explains why it was that they could not speak with Yosef like he was their brother. The brothers believed that Yosef hated them as well, but he hid it and pretended like he was innocent. Therefore, when the pasuk says that they were unable to speak with him peacefully, it really means that they were unable to hide their hatred like their brother Yosef.

The Vilna Gaon has a fascinating pshat on the Gemara in Berachot, that one who takes leave from his friend should not say *לך בשלום*, go in peace, rather *לך לשלום*, go to peace. The reason for this is that there are passages in Tanach that use both languages, yet when the language used is *לך בשלום*, the recipient of “blessing” usually heads down a negative path, and when the language used is *לך לשלום*, the path is a path of success. The Gra therefore interprets the pasuk: since the brothers hated Yosef, they were not able to speak with him *לשלום* because they were not happy that Yosef was going to rise to greatness and success.

The lesson we can learn from this story of Yosef and his brothers and the idea that we can implement is expressed beautifully by the *Pele Yoetz*, Rabbi Eliezer Papo זצוק”ל. When a person gives “shalom”, greeting, to his friend, he should make sure that his heart and lips are equal and not be part of the people that are spoken about in Yirmiyahu (9:7):

בְּפִיו שְׁלוֹם אֶת רֵעֵהוּ יְדַבֵּר וּבִקְרֹבוֹ יָשִׁים אָרְבוֹ

“He speaks peaceably to his neighbor with his mouth, but inside there is a trap”.

This type of person gives a false impression. Also, the Torah speaks about the brothers of Yosef, about whom we learn their praises from their negative actions, since they hated Yosef and could not speak with him peacefully. Therefore, when a person sees that it is fitting to hate someone according to halacha, one should not ask

about his well-being because he is pretending that this person is fitting to be given praise. One needs to calculate carefully if the person he is giving “shalom” to is worthy of praise or not. A person must always take extreme care with how they act around other people, and should always be genuine and truthful in all their ways.

NO PAIN NO GAIN

ADINA EISENMAN ('22)

One of the first pesukim in this week’s parsha, Parshat Vayeishev, states that:

וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת יוֹסֵף מִכָּל בָּנָיו כִּי בֶן זִקְנִים הוּא
לוֹ וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים

“And Yisrael loved Yoseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic” (Bereishit 37:3).

Rashi interprets the word פָּסִים as splendid and wonderful. He then points out a midrash which explains that the words כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים represent all of Yosef’s struggles. The midrash says that each letter of the word פָּסִים represents a step in the sale of Yosef:

“פ” represents Potifar, the man who would eventually buy Yosef. The “ס” represents the *sochrim*, the merchants who played a role in the purchase and sale of Yosef. Finally, the “י” and the “מ” stand for the Yishmalim and Midyanim, who originally purchased Yosef from the brothers.

The question here is obvious: how can one word represent Yosef’s hardships as well as the concept of splendorous beauty? These two explanations seem completely contradictory! Rashi is trying to show us that our struggles are what make our lives beautiful. In order to grow up from being an immature נער, Yosef had to endure this suffering. Each specific part of his journey was a step towards him becoming the incredible צדיק he would go on to be.

Rabbi Elchonon Jacobovitz explains that this idea is shown again through the story of the birth of Binyamin. His mother Rachel endures terrible pain and dies in labor. She calls her son בן אוני, which is the language of pain. Why would she name her child, “the child of my pain?” Why would she leave her son with such a dark message to stay with him forever?

This answer lies deeper than the surface as Rachel was trying to instill a fundamental idea into her child. Rather than translating Ben-Oni as, “the son of my pain,” we can understand it as, “there’s a son to my pain.” She is showing that her terrible struggles inevitably led to something beautiful, her amazing son Binyamin.

A message we should all take away from this week's parsha is the idea that no matter what troubles we are facing, we should remember that they will lead to something beautiful. Just as Yosef's struggles led him to fulfill his destiny and Rachel's pain led her to the birth of her child, so too all of our struggles make us who we are. We should always remember to appreciate the challenges Hashem puts in our lives, knowing that everything happens for a reason. Let us remember this uplifting idea whenever we are going through a hard time. Shabbat shalom!

MASTERPLAN

TALIA STAUBER ('20)

This week's parsha, Parshat Vayeishev, tells the story of Yosef's famous dreams. The plot of the dreams and the way Yosef tells them to his brothers are quite startling. For starters, the dreams seem to paint Yosef as a power-hungry, young boy who believes he is greater than his elders. This, we know, is not who Yosef was, but he comes across that way for the moment. Additionally, Yosef relayed his dreams to his brothers, almost as if he was bragging to people that already disliked him. The pasuk clearly says:

וַיְהִי כִּי יַסֵּף יַחְלֹם חֲלֹמוֹת וַיַּגֵּד לְאֶחָיו וַיִּסְפוּ עוֹד שָׂנְאָה אֹתוֹ

"Yosef told his brothers his dream and they continued to hate him" (Bereishit 37:5).

Yosef must have known this dream would upset his brothers; it seems obvious. So was Yosef an over-confident flaunter?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe gives a beautiful idea of the meaning behind the sheaves of wheat shown in Yosef's first dream. A sheaf of wheat is made up of many individual stalks of wheat bundled together. As members of Am Yisrael, we are each individual stalks of wheat, with unique abilities and talents. However, we are bound to one another through our common purpose to serve *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, who is represented by the middle sheaf.

This idea presented by the Lubavitcher Rebbe resolves both of these questions for it presents a slightly different interpretation of Yosef's dream than the traditional one we are accustomed to. We often learn that the center sheaf represented Yosef, but the Rebbe's approach that the center sheaf represents Hashem suggests that Yosef was not thinking of *himself* as imperial, but that he was thinking of his duty to Hashem as regal. This explanation does not conflict with the traditional one; it just gives new depth to it. The same way someone must stand for a *talmid chacham* in order to honor the Torah knowledge they bear (Shach 244:1-2), so too the brothers must ultimately bow to Yosef to honor his role in Hashem's plan. Yosef is not being haughty; instead, the dream is a declaration of his admiration of God and his desire for unity among the brothers. Looking at it that way, it makes sense that Yosef did not think this dream would upset his brothers.

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