

פרשת וישב Parshat Vayeishev

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Parsha Summary

In this week's parsha, Parshat Vayeishev, Yosef tells his brothers about his dreams that imply he will eventually rule over them. They get jealous and sell him into slavery. He gets sold to Potifar, an Egyptian chief, and becomes Potifar's chief of staff after performing excellently and with Hashem's help. Potifar's wife tried to seduce Yosef, but after he rejected her she accused him of trying to seduce her and Potifar threw him into jail. In jail, Yosef interprets the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker. The story of Yosef is briefly interrupted by the story of Yehuda and Tamar. Yehuda got married and had three sons, two of whom died. He then married Tamar (who was his daughter-in-law) to fulfill yibum and had two sons with her.

Fully Committed

Rabbi Beny Horowitz

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Zach Dennis ('23)

Elan Harris ('25)

Shoshana Weinstock ('24)

Abby Bienenfeld ('26)

Yosef HaTza-dik! Not many people are given this appellation. But what makes him so great? If we read the

alone in the house. As he was about to sin, however, he stopped and ran away. Rashi explains that what made Yosef stop himself from sinning was seeing a vision of the face of his father.

What was it about seeing his father's face that prevented Yosef from following through with his sin? Perhaps we can understand it with the following approach. We know that Yosef and Yaakov had very similar childhoods. Yaakov was hated by Esav. He had to separate himself from his family to run away from his brother. Yaakov had to live in the house of Lavan, a liar and a cheat with terrible morals. Yosef also had brothers who hated him. He, too, was separated from his father's house, and he, too, was stuck living in a morally-depraved society (Mitzrayim).

Perhaps Yosef began to wonder what his life

story in Parshat Vayeishev carefully, we find an episode that might shed some light on this. Having been sold into slavery by his brothers, Yosef is thankfully able to find himself in the good graces of Potifar. Then a new problem arises: Potifar's wife sees Yosef's beauty and tries to seduce him. Yosef attempted to refuse, but after repeated efforts by her he seems to reconsider. According to one opinion given by Rashi (39:11), Yosef was about to give in to his desire and sleep with her, even finding a time when he knew they would be

would look like. He might have thought: “My father does not know where I am to come and save me. My brothers almost killed me and are certainly happy I am no longer around. I will be a slave for the rest of my life with no prospect of getting out. The rest of my life is hopeless. Where is Hashem Who has made my life so hard? Why should I remain a moral and holy person? I might as well give in to Potifar’s wife!”

At this exact moment, Yosef sees an image of Yaakov, his own father who had faced the identical challenges as Yosef. Yaakov could have also asked “where is Hashem?” and “what is the point?” Yaakov could have allowed himself to be influenced by Lavan. And yet we know that despite all of his challenges, Yaakov did not give in. He remained fully committed to Hashem even as he lived in Lavan’s house.

When Yosef is reminded of his father who was able to defeat the same challenges that Yosef himself faced, he is inspired. He realizes that he can overcome this desire, that he has to be true to himself and that he cannot give in. He finds the strength to run away from Potifar’s wife and in so doing begins his first steps to becoming Yosef HaTzadik.

Lessons in Leadership

Zach Dennis ('23)

This week’s parsha, Parshat Vayeishev, starts off telling us about the story of Yosef and his brothers. We learn about how Yaakov favored Yosef and that Yosef would tell on the brothers, culminating in their hatred toward him and their eventual decision to dispose of him. The storyline gets intense when they suggest killing Yosef, then throwing him in a pit to die, finally deciding to follow Yehuda’s plan and sell him instead. Yaakov axiomatically mourns over Yosef and is unable to be consoled. Strangely, the Torah then interrupts to tell us the story of Yehuda and Tamar before making its way back to Yosef and his journey.

Rashi asks the obvious question: what is the

story of Yehuda and Tamar doing in the middle of the story of Yosef?! B”H, with a strong question comes a *geshmak* answer. Rashi tells us that the Torah juxtaposes these two stories to teach us an important lesson. The pasuk says:

וַיָּהִי בָּעֵת הַהִוא וַיָּרֹא יְהוּדָה מֵאַת אַחִיו

“And it came about at that time that Yehudah went down from his brothers...” (Bereishit 38:1).

This pasuk is not only telling us about a literal *תַּלְוִי*, descent, but also a *תַּלְוִי* in status. Rashi (38:1) tells us that when the brothers realized how much pain selling Yosef caused Yaakov, they blamed Yehuda, saying: “you were the leader and we only sold him because you told us to. If you would have told us to return him, we would have listened to you!” Therefore the brothers lowered him from his leadership status in response to seeing their father’s pain.

This is a great lesson we can all take to heart and learn from. When you’re in a position of leadership, when your friends look up to you to be “the guy”, you have a responsibility to lead down the correct path. You have to realize that people are watching to see how you react to certain situations and your decision has the power to determine a positive or negative effect. It may not always be easy, but with Hashem’s help may we be *zoche* to collectively make only good decisions and lead ourselves and our friends on the

דָּבָר חַיָּשֶׁר וְהַטּוֹב

Dream Job

Elan Harris ('25)

In this week’s parsha, Parshat Vayeishev, we hear about Yosef’s dreams and the effect they had on his brothers.

The Torah says:

וַיַּחֲלֹם עוֹד חֲלֹם אֶחָר וַיְסַפֵּר אֶתְהָיוֹת

“And he again dreamed another dream and he told it to his brothers...” (Bereishit 37:9). Yosef’s brothers hated him after he told them the first dream. The Chachamim ask a question: why then did Yosef continue to antagonize them by relating another dream?

The gemara (Brachot 55b) gives us the answer. First, it begins by stating that the dreams we have at night are a result of what we think about during the day. In relating the first dream, Yosef told his brothers about the material success and wealth he anticipated. Though they all worked together in the field, he would become richer, and they would bow to him. When the brothers heard this, they hated him because they figured that the dream depicted what he thought about during the day.

Yosef was eager to prove to his brothers that the first dream was an act of Heaven and not related to his daytime thinking. Therefore, he told them of the second dream, which was about an impossibility (how could his mother, who had died, bow to him?). He hoped they would believe that just as he did not think about this during the day, he also did not think about the contents of the first dream during the day.

The brothers realized that his dreams were valid and that they were a signal from Heaven. Therefore, upon hearing the second dream, they became jealous of him.

Like Father, Like Son

Shoshana Weinstock ('24)

The midrash says that the words

אלה תולדות יעקב יוסף

“these are the generations of Yaakov, Yosef...”

(Bereishit 37:2)

Yaakov and Yosef were born circumcised, born from mothers who were barren for a long time, both died in Egypt, and both their bodies were embalmed and brought to their final resting place in Israel. While the midrash focuses on external and coincidental similarities, Rabbi Moshe Amiel discusses internal and behavioral similarities related to the personalities of Yaakov and Yosef. They are both the only among the Avot time period that dream and cry. We are not told that Avraham or Yitzchak

dreamed dreams. The first of the Avot in the Torah to dream is Yaakov:

וַיַּחֲלֹם וַיַּהֲנֵה סֶלֶם מֵעֶב אֶרְצָה וַיָּאֶשֶׁן מִגַּע הַשְּׁמִינִיה...

“And he dreamed, and behold! A ladder set up on the ground and its top reached to heaven”

(Bereishit 28:12).

Yosef takes after his father in this regard. Not only does the Torah describe two of Yosef’s dreams, but Yosef is familiar enough with the subject that he is capable of interpreting dreams for others.

Dreaming is often creative. We usually dream about things that don’t exist in our real lives, yet our dreams can point to a potential that exists. It’s not surprising that both Yaakov and Yosef are dreamers, considering that they both had the potential to be the *bechor* (or were the firstborn on some level). The gemara (Bava Batra 123a) says:

ראיה היה בכורה לנצח מרחך

“it was fitting for the rights of the firstborn to come from Rachel”.

If things went according to plan and Rachel got married first, then Yosef would’ve been the firstborn. Similarly, Rashi in Parshat Toldot (25:26) quotes a midrashic tradition that Yaakov was conceived first and therefore can be considered the firstborn on some level. Both Yosef and Yaakov could be considered firstborns on a level of reality beyond what we can see. Dreaming is at times about seeing an alternate reality. It is therefore not surprising that Yaakov and Yosef who were both dreamers have a “firstborn persona” based on an alternate reality.

Second, Yaakov and Yosef both cry, something Avraham or Yitzchak don’t do. The one place where the Torah says that Avraham cried was an expression of honor for his wife Sarah, and even there the Torah writes the word cry with a small chof, to teach us that crying is not typically a part of Avraham’s character. Yosef cries a number of times in the Torah, specifically when he is reunited with his brothers, both before they know that he is Yosef and then after the reunion is complete. While Yosef

cries a number of times, his brothers never do. In this way, Yosef takes after his father Yaakov. As we learned regarding Yaakov:

וַיַּשְׁךְ יַעֲקֹב לְרַחֵל וַיִּשְׁאָף קָלָנוּ וַיַּבְךְ

“And Yaakov kissed Rachel and he raised his voice and he cried” (Bereishit 29:11).

Like father, like son. Dreaming and crying are both expressions of sensitivity. Crying and dreaming both come from our emotions, not our intellect. Yaakov cries just like Yosef cries, and Yosef dreams just as Yaakov dreams. A recipe for a fulfilling and meaningful life is to emulate Yaakov and Yosef in these two ways: first, to be vulnerable and self-aware and to embrace all our emotions, even when it will bring us to cry. Second, to be bold enough to dream about different realities and about changing ourselves and the world around us for the better.

The Will To Serve

Abby Beinfeld ('26)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Vayeishev, the story about Yosef in jail with the baker and butler takes place. At the end of the parsha, when the butler explains his dream to Yosef, he says, **כָּס פְּרֻעָה** four times (Bereishit 40). The Talmud Yerushalmi explains that the reason for drinking four cups of wine at the Pesach Seder is because of this story where the butler says **כָּס פְּרֻעָה** four times. What is the significance of the butler saying “Pharaoh's cup” repeatedly?

The answer is that by continuously repeating **כָּס פְּרֻעָה**, he was showing his obsession to serve Pharaoh. So what is the connection between this story of the butler and the Pesach seder? The connection between the two is that the butler had *ratzon*, the desire, to serve Pharaoh. Similarly, on Pesach when we are all together we are showing *ratzon* – a desire to serve Hashem. Just like the butler had such a strong desire to serve Pharaoh, how much more so should we have the strong *ratzon* to serve Hashem.

This is the connection between us on Pesach and the butler; we are showing that we have a *ratzon* and enthusiasm to serve Hashem. We learn this enthusiasm and *ratzon* from the butler in our parsha. If the butler had this great of a desire to serve a human king, Pharaoh, then we should have an even greater desire and enthusiasm to serve our king, Hashem.

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