



Parshas Vayeshev

For the week ending 26 Kislev 5757
6 & 7 December 1996

Overview

Yaakov Avinu settles in the land of Canaan. His favorite son, Yosef, brings him critical reports about his brothers. Yaakov makes for Yosef a fine tunic of multi-colored woolen strips. Yosef exacerbates his brothers' hatred by recounting prophetic dreams — of sheaves of wheat bowing to his sheaf, and of the sun, the moon and the stars bowing down to him — signifying that all his family will appoint him king. The brothers indict Yosef and resolve to execute him. When Yosef comes to Shechem, the brothers relent, and decide, at Reuven's instigation, to throw him into a pit instead. Yehuda persuades the brothers to take Yosef out of the pit and sell him to a caravan of passing Yishmaelims. When Reuven returns to find the pit empty, he rends his clothes in anguish. The brothers soak Yosef's tunic in goat's blood and show it to their father Yaakov, who assumes that Yosef has been devoured by wild animals. Yaakov is inconsolable. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef has been sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh's Chamberlain of the Butchers. In the Parsha's sub-plot, Yehuda's son Er dies as punishment for preventing his wife Tamar from becoming pregnant because he feared that she would lose her beauty. Onan, Yehuda's second son, then weds Tamar by levirate marriage. He too is punished in circumstances similar to those of his brother. When Yehuda's wife dies, Tamar resolves to have children through Yehuda, as this union will found the Davidic line, culminating in the Mashiach. Meanwhile, Yosef rises to power in the house of his Egyptian master. His extreme beauty attracts the unwanted advances of his master's wife. Enraged by his rejection of her, she slanders Yosef, falsely accusing him of attempting to seduce her, and he is imprisoned. While in jail, Yosef successfully predicts the outcome of the dream of Pharaoh's wine steward, who is re-instated; and the dream of Pharaoh's baker, who is hanged. In spite of his promise, the wine steward forgets to help Yosef after he is released, and Yosef languishes in jail.

Insights

DIFFERENCE AND DEFERENCE

“And Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his sons...” (37:3)

Once there was a Jew who was shipwrecked on a desert island. After many years, he was finally rescued by a passing ship. Before he left the island, he insisted on showing his rescuers the three synagogues that he had built **“Three synagogues?”** asked the captain of the ship. **“Why does a castaway on a deserted island need three synagogues?”**

The Jew replied **“In this one I daven (pray) Shacharis — the morning prayer. And in this one I daven Mincha — the afternoon prayer. And this one, I wouldn't be seen dead in!”**

At the beginning of time, the six days of Creation were like nomads all traveling in different directions. Each was separate from the other. Removed and divided. Solitary. Like parts of a body floating, disjointed and disparate.

With the advent of the first Shabbos, all the parts of Creation were unified. Shabbos breathed a soul into them all. From then on, all parts of Creation sensed the power of the force that unified them.

The same was true of the Tribes of Israel. Each brother regarded himself as a separate entity, a complete unit by himself. No two people think exactly alike. And certainly no two Jews! However, this isn't because of an intellectual lacking, rather our disparity is a hallmark of the reverse. Not even the greatest of our enemies have accused us of being a stupid people. Rootless cosmopolitans, yes. Communists, Capitalists, Bohemians, Conservatives. Everything but stupid.

The division of the tribes was a mirror of the uniqueness of the Jewish soul and its individuality.

Yosef was Shabbos to the tribes.

He represented the power to bring all the Jewish People together — just as Shabbos brings all the days of the week together under its sway.

However, when the brothers started to hate him, he was no longer able to unify them. Their divisiveness deepened, until they sold Yosef into slavery, at which point they decided that each should go his own way.

For the more a person identifies himself with the group, the stronger the group is, and the less he identifies, the weaker it becomes, until it must eventually disintegrate. Thus, with the selling of Yosef, the power of unity was exiled to Egypt and necessarily the tribes divided one from the other.

(Adapted from Shem MiShmuel)

VIRTUALLY REAL

“Yosef replied [to the baker]... ‘In another three days, Pharaoh will lift your head from you, and hang you on a tree, and birds will eat your flesh.’” (40:19)

What did Yosef see in the baker's dream that led him to conclude that the baker would be hanged?

There once was an open-air computer-art exhibition which took as its theme **“Ultra-Realism.”** Some of the paintings were so life-like as to be almost frightening. However, there was one painting by a famous artist that was so life-like that it almost took the ‘virtual’ out of ‘virtual reality’!

The painting depicted a man holding a bowl of fruit. Such was the verisimilitude of this work, that birds in the park **actually descended and tried to peck at the fruit and eat it.** The artist was furious and demanded that plate glass be installed in front of his masterpiece.

Continued on next page

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Parshas Vayeshev — 26 Kislev 5757, 6 & 7 December 1996

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Continued from previous page

A national newspaper reported the story, and a bright spark in the circulation department suggested that the newspaper run a competition, giving a hefty prize to anyone who could spot a flaw in the painting's virtual reality.

A lady from Leeds wrote into the paper: "I must admit that the pieces of fruit in the bowl are indeed palpably real. However, the man holding the bowl has not been so fortunate. He certainly lacks the breath of life. For if it were not so, surely, the birds would have never descended to attack the fruit in the first place. They would have been far too fearful of the man!"

Some days later, the lady from Leeds was happy to receive a hefty check in the post.

When the baker described to Yosef that in his dream the birds descended and ate bread from the baskets on his head, Yosef realized that no bird will approach a *living* man in this way.

Thus, he deduced that the man on whose head these baskets rested was as good as dead — not even a living scarecrow.

(Based on Rabbi Meir Shapiro in *Mayana shel Torah*)

SPEAKING BETWEEN THE LINES

"...and Yosef would bring evil reports about them [his brothers] to their father" (37:2)

Can it be that Yosef *HaTzaddik* — the righteous person — could have spoken *lashon hara* (lit. 'evil tongue') about his brothers?

When a father looks at his children and remarks that one is exemplary, this necessarily forces the other children to conform to that example. And the others will be judged lacking, to the degree that they fall short of their sibling.

"Why can't you be like your brother — now that's the way a person should behave!"

It wasn't that Yosef actually *spoke* evil about his brothers; rather that his excellence was like a silent accusation against them. For, however elevated the brothers may have been in ultimate terms, comparatively they were not on Yosef's level.

And comparison always makes the lesser seem inadequate.

Next to Everest, even K2 pales.

If this was the case, and Yosef didn't actually accuse them, then why was he punished?

The greater the righteousness of a person, the greater is his obligation to conceal it — even from his father.

(Based on Admor Rabbi Menachem MiAnshenov in *Iturei Torah*)

Haftorah for Shabbos Chanukah Zechariah 2:14-4:7

The festival that we call *Chanukah* is really the *fourth* Chanukah.

The word 'Chanukah' means 'dedication.' The first of the three previous dedications was in the desert when Moshe dedicated the *Mishkan* — the Tent of Meeting.

The second was the dedication of the First *Beis Hamikdash* (Holy Temple). The third Chanukah is the subject of our Haftorah. It refers to the times of the Second *Beis Hamikdash* and the inauguration of the Menorah at the time of Yehoshua, the *Kohen Gadol*, and the nation's leader, *Zerubavel*, who is referred to in *Ma'oz Tzur* — the traditional Chanukah song.

MOTHER NATURE'S FATHER

After a small band of Jews had beaten the might of Greece, one small flask of oil for the Menorah was discovered in the Holy Temple — one small flask, un-defiled by the Greeks...

That flask contained enough oil to last just one short day. But it burned and burned for eight days. To commemorate that miracle we kindle the lights of Chanukah for eight days.

But if you think about it — really we should only light the lights for seven days, because on that first day the lights burned completely naturally — after all, there was enough oil for one day! So why do we light candles for eight nights, since it seems that one of those nights was no miracle at all?

One answer is that eighth candle is to remind us of a miracle that is constantly with us. The problem is that a lot of the time we don't see it as a miracle at all. We don't call it a miracle. We call it 'Nature.'

In this week's Haftorah, the prophet Zechariah is shown a vision of a Menorah made entirely of gold, complete with a reservoir, tubes to bring it oil, and two olives trees to bear olives. A complete self-supporting system.

The symbolism is that Hashem provides a system which supports us continuously. However, we have to open our eyes to see from where that support is coming.

And that's the reason we light the eighth candle — to celebrate the miraculous in the mundane. To remind ourselves that Mother Nature has a Father.

(Based on the *Beis Yosef* and the *Artscroll/Stone Chumash*)



INSIGHTS INTO THE ZEMIRO
SUNG AT THE SHABBOS TABLE
THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.

BARUCH KEIL ELYON-*ihkg ke I urc*
"BLESSED IS G-D..."

In all your dwelling places
you shall do no work.

בכל מושבותיכם
לא תעשו מלאכה

b'chol moshvosachem
lo sa'asu m'lacha

We are reminded in the Torah (*Vayikra* 23:1) that "It is Shabbos to Hashem in all you dwelling places."

This description of Shabbos, observes the *Sfas Emes*, captures the essential difference between Shabbos and the Festivals. In order to come into contact with the ultimate spirituality of the three festivals, a Jew had to make an *aliya laregel* pilgrimage to the *Beis Hamikdash*. On Shabbos, however, the holiness of the day comes to the Jews in every one of their dwelling places.

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