

## TEMPLE BETH-EL SHABBAT AM TORAH STUDY 5782

### VAYEISHEV.... Genesis 37:1-14

**KOSHI = What's the Question that calls us to inquire?**

*What do we learn about a parent/child relationship from Jacob and Joseph's relationship? What does Joseph's journey teach us about our own journey?*

**PSHAT....The Simple Meaning...What is the straightforward story we are trying to understand?**

<b>37:1</b>	Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojourned, the land of Canaan.	וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מְגֹרֵי אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן
<b>2</b>	This, then, is the line of Jacob: At seventeen years of age, Joseph tended the flocks with his brothers, as a helper to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. And Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father.	אֵלֶּה תְּלֻדֹת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף בֶּן־שִׁבְעֵ־עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה הָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת־אֶחָיו בְּצֹאן וְהוּא נֹעַר אֶת־בְּנֵי בְלָהָה וְאֶת־בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה נָשִׂי אָבִיו וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־דִּבְתֵּם רָעָה אֶל־אָבִיהֶם
<b>3</b>	Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic.	וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִכָּל־בְּנָיו כִּי־בֶן־זָקֵנִים הוּא לוֹ וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים
<b>4</b>	And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him.	וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶחָיו כִּי־אָהַב אֶתּוֹ אֶהָב אָבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אֶחָיו וַיִּשְׁנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלֵם
<b>5</b>	Once Joseph had a dream which he told to his brothers; and they hated him even more.	וַיַּחְלֵם יוֹסֵף חֲלוֹם וַיַּגִּד לְאֶחָיו וַיּוֹסְפוּ עוֹד שְׂנֹא אֹתוֹ
<b>6</b>	He said to them, "Hear this dream which I have dreamed:	וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שְׁמַעוּ־נָא הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חֲלַמְתִּי
<b>7</b>	There we were binding sheaves in the field, when suddenly my sheaf stood up and remained upright; then your sheaves gathered around and bowed low to my sheaf."	וְהִנֵּה אֲנִיחֵנוּ מְאֻלָּמִים אֲלֵמִים בְּתוֹךְ הַשְּׂדֵה וְהִנֵּה קָמָה אֲלַמְתִּי וְגַם־נִצְבָּה וְהִנֵּה תִסְבִּינָה אֲלַמְתֵּיכֶם וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוִינַן לְאֲלַמְתִּי
<b>8</b>	His brothers answered, "Do you mean to reign over us? Do you mean to rule over us?" And they hated him even more for his talk about his dreams.	וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אֶחָיו הֲמִלְךָ תִמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם־מְשׁוֹל תִּמְשָׁל בָּנוּ וַיּוֹסְפוּ עוֹד שְׂנֹא אֹתוֹ עַל־חֲלֻמֹתָיו וְעַל־דִּבְרָיו
<b>9</b>	He dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers, saying, "Look, I have had another dream: And this time, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me."	וַיַּחְלֵם עוֹד חֲלוֹם אַחֵר וַיְסַפֵּר אֹתוֹ לְאֶחָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה חֲלַמְתִּי חֲלוֹם עוֹד וְהִנֵּה הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְאֶחָד עָשָׂר כּוֹכָבִים מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לִי
<b>10</b>	And when he told it to his father and brothers, his father berated him. "What," he said to him, "is this dream you have dreamed? Are we to come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow low to you to the ground?"	וַיְסַפֵּר אֶל־אָבִיו וְאֶל־אֶחָיו וַיִּגְעַר־בּוֹ אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מָה הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חֲלַמְתָּ הֲבֹא נִבּוֹא אֲנִי וְאִמִּי וְאֶחָיִךְ לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְךָ אֶרְצָה
<b>11</b>	So his brothers were wrought up at him, and his father kept the matter in mind.	וַיִּקְנְאוּ־בּוֹ אֶחָיו וְאָבִיו שָׁמַר אֶת־הַדָּבָר

12	One time, when his brothers had gone to pasture their father's flock at Shechem,	וַיֵּלְכוּ אֶחָיו לְרֵעוֹת אֶת־צֹאן אָבִיהֶם בְּשֶׁכֶם
13	Israel said to Joseph, "Your brothers are pasturing at Shechem. Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "I am ready."	וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יוֹסֵף הֲלוֹא אֶחָיֶךָ רֹעִים בְּשֶׁכֶם לָכֵה וְאֶשְׁלַחְךָ אֲלֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הֲנִנִי
14	And he said to him, "Go and see how your brothers are and how the flocks are faring, and bring me back word." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron....	וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לָךְ־נָא רְאֵה אֶת־שְׁלוֹם אֶחָיֶךָ וְאֶת־שְׁלוֹם הַצֹּאן וְהַשִּׁבְנִי דָבָר וַיִּשְׁלַחְהוּ מֵעֵמֶק הַחֲבֵרוֹן ...

**REMEZ....** *The Hint...* Searching for clues that gives us greater insight into the world of our ancestors

**V. 2**  
**OR HACHAIM<sup>1</sup>...seventeen years old...** The reason the Torah had to tell us Joseph's age was because we know from Berachot 55 that if a person had a good dream he should wait up to twenty two years for it to become true. Had we not been informed here that Joseph was seventeen at the time he had these dreams we would not have known that rule.

**who was tending flocks with his brothers...**

**CHIZKUNI...**The Torah calls the sons of Leah Joseph's "brothers," as they were the sons of their father's principal wives; it did not refer to the sons of Zilpah and Bilhah by the same term. An alternate exegesis of why the word *achiv* אחיו was used here: *v'hu na'ar*, נער, "he was only tending flocks as long as he was still very young;" at that point it was not considered as below the dignity of the sons of Yaakov's secondary wives to be tending flocks with them.... It is not surprising that he reported on what he considered misconduct by these "brothers," seeing that he was still very immature, i.e. merely a נער, *na'ar*, young boy.

**RADAK<sup>2</sup>...** the Torah wrote בצאן "with the flocks," instead of הצאן, "the flocks," as Joseph was marked for being relatively young he was only allowed to work together with his brothers instead of being allowed to tends flocks all by himself. He was still a trainee.

**Joseph reported negative reports about them...**

**CHIZKUNI...**sons of Bilhah and Zilpah hated him as talebearer, and his other brothers hated him because he was a favorite of their father. They were therefore afraid that in due course their father would appoint him as his firstborn. When the Torah writes (in verse four: וישנאו אותו, "they hated him,") it refers to all of the brothers except Binyamin who was only 10-11 years old. Each group of brothers had a different reason for hating him. They were afraid that their father would treat Joseph as their grandfather Yitzchok had treated his son Esau, because of emotional attachment, not based on objective considerations.

**IBN EZRA<sup>3</sup>...** The sons of the concubines (the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah) made Joseph their attendant (servant) since he was their younger brother. This was the *evil report of them* which he brought unto their father....

**RADAK...** ....In Bereshit Rabbah 84:7 we are told that according to Rabbi Meir Joseph told his fathers that the brothers were suspect of violating the commandment not to eat flesh from a still living animal, whereas Rabbi Yehudah is supposed to have said that Joseph accused them of treating the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah with disdain, referring to them as "slaves." Rabbi Shimon is reported as saying that Joseph accused the brothers of casting lustful glances at the local Canaanite girls. Rabbi Yehudah bar Seymon claims that God repaid Joseph for all three accusations as we derive from Proverbs 16:11, "Honest scales and weights are the Lord's." God said to him: "you accused your brothers of violating the law of eating flesh from a still living animal, you will be a witness

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar (1696-1743), a Talmudist and kabbalist, wrote *Or HaChaim*, his commentary on the Torah.  
<sup>2</sup> Rabbi David Kimhi (1160-1235) was a French medieval rabbi, biblical commentator, philosopher, and grammarian.  
<sup>3</sup> Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra (1089-c.1167) was a biblical commentator and philosopher in the Middle Ages from Spain.

that even when they were engaged in a sinful enterprise such as dipping your cloak in blood before presenting it to your father, they first slaughtered the male goat ritually, as is required when they would eat it. You accused them of calling the sons of Zilpah and Bilhah slaves, that is why you yourself were sold into slavery. You accused your brothers of looking lecherously at the local girls, I will cause you to be tempted by this very phenomenon.” This is why the Torah described the wife of Potiphar attempting to seduce Joseph (39:7)

**V. 3... RASHI<sup>4</sup>...coat of many colors...** There is a Midrashic statement that in the word *passim* פסים we may find an allusion to all his misfortunes: he was sold to Potiphar (פוטיפר), to the merchants (סוחרים), to the Ishmaelites (ישמעאלים), and to the Midianites (מדינים) (Genesis Rabbah 84:8).

**V. 4... RABBEINU BAHYA<sup>5</sup>...they could not speak a friendly word to him...** This was actually a positive aspect of their characters. Instead of hiding their hostility and flattering Joseph, they were straightforward in revealing their feelings toward him (Bereshit Rabbah 84:9).

**V. 5... OR HACHAIM...Joseph dreamed a dream which he told to his brothers...** Why did Joseph add to his brothers' hatred of him by telling them of his grandiose dreams? ...Perhaps Joseph went to tell his brothers that they were wrong in ascribing his dreams to his ambitions, but that for some reason God planned to elevate him to a high position and that Jacob's agreeing to send him on this mission was a sign that all of this had been approved by God. He may have hoped to assuage their hatred of him by accepting the mission. On the other hand, he may have warned them that the time would come when they would have need of him, and that they might do better to suppress their hatred of him pending further developments; otherwise they would expose themselves to retaliation on his part when the time came. He was convinced that the brothers would accept what seemed to them a heavenly decree. There is yet another possibility. Joseph actually hoped to draw his brothers' hearts nearer to him.... Joseph hoped that by telling the brothers of his dreams they would themselves find an acceptable and plausible explanation which would put their minds at ease. At least they would realize that Joseph had no ambition to become king over them. Why else would he be silly enough to provoke their hatred by telling them about his dreams? All of this might have worked if the existing hatred had not already closed the brothers' minds to any conciliatory gestures.

**V. 11... SFORNO<sup>6</sup>...and his father remembered it...** he remembered it because he thought that the dream reflected what would in fact occur. In fact, his father was looking forward to the fulfillment of Joseph's dream. This reflects the statement in the Talmud Sanhedrin 105 that a person may be jealous of everyone except his students and his children.

**V. 13... RASHI...Hineni...** With humility and readiness, though he was well aware his brothers hated him.

<b>DRASH .... The Interpretation...How do ancient truths impact our modern reality?</b>
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**V. 3**  
**RABBEINU BAHYA...Israel...** For this father's love had a spiritual origin—one which held God's future promise.

**for he was the child of his old age...**

**RABBEINU BAHYA...**According to a Midrashic approach as found both in Tanchuma and Bereshit Rabbah, Joseph was selected as Yaakov's prime issue as he was so like his father. This is what the Torah meant when writing כִּי בֶן זִקְנוֹיִם הוּא לֹא "for he was the child of his old age", that his features resembled those of his father. He also

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105) was a medieval French rabbi and author.

<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Bahya ben Asher (1255-1340) was a commentator on Tanach.

<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Ovadia ben Jacob Sforno (1475-1550) was a biblical commentator, philosopher, and physician from Italy.

resembled his father in that many experiences which Yaakov endured were more or less duplicated in the life of Joseph. Whereas Yaakov had been pursued by his brother Esau, Joseph was persecuted by his brothers. Just as Yaakov's mother had been barren for many years, so Joseph's mother had been barren for many years. Just as Yaakov was born without a foreskin, so Joseph was born without a foreskin. [We derive this from the fact that Yaakov was described by the Torah as אִישׁ תָּם, a perfectly formed human being, i.e. one that did not need to be circumcised in order to make him whole.]... These similarities also showed up in that just as Yaakov's mother experienced a difficult pregnancy and birth, so did Joseph's mother experience difficulty when giving birth to Binyamin. Just as Yaakov's mother gave birth to only two sons so did Joseph's mother give birth to only two sons. Yaakov and Joseph both married while outside the land of Canaan. The children of both Yaakov and Joseph were born outside the land of Canaan. Both Yaakov and Joseph experienced the company of angels protecting them. Rabbi Yannai (compare Bereshit Rabbah 84,14) claims that Joseph was met by three angels while he searched for his brothers... Just as Yaakov emerged from a dream containing a vision spiritually uplifted, so Joseph emerged similarly uplifted after having certain dreams. Just as the environment of Yaakov (the house of Lavan, and, according to some sources the entire region) experienced God's blessing, as well as the famine coming to an end when he descended to Egypt, so Joseph's presence both in the house of Potiphar and in Egypt generally proved a blessing for all those around him. Just as Yaakov died in Egypt and his remains were embalmed there only to be buried in the land of Israel eventually, so Joseph died in Egypt, was embalmed there and eventually was reburied in the land of Israel.

**RAMBAN**<sup>7</sup>... The correct interpretation appears to me to be that it was the custom of the elders to take one of their younger sons to be with them to attend them. He would constantly lean on his arm, never being separated from him, and he would be called *ben z'kunav* because he attended him in his old age. Now Jacob took Joseph for this purpose, and he was with him constantly. He therefore did not accompany the flock when they went to pasture in distant places. And Onkelos who translated, "he was a wise son," intended to say that in his father's eyes, Joseph was a knowledgeable and wise son, and his understanding was as that of elders.

**SOD.... The Secret .... What deeper knowing do we take away after spending time with the Torah text?**

**RABBI ADIN STEINSALTZ**<sup>8</sup>... The key to Joseph's journey may lie in that first label given to him—"dreamer." This epithet confers on Joseph the character of an agent—a man on a mission. He was not a prophet, and thus differed from his father...Yet he had a vision...Yet the problem of 'the dreamer' is the unfinished nature of that vision...Who, after all, is this dreamer? Was Joseph just a bemused young man with fantasies of greatness, or was he the object of extraordinary vision, transporting him into an unknown future? ...Only when he struggled to reach great heights was Joseph able to observe that his dreams might be true visions...What might have been the daydream of his youth had become a profound prophecy.... All his life, Joseph continued to dream... From being the dreamer of dreams, Joseph grew into the person of the dream. He developed from arrogance and ignorance of the dream's meaning to a man who experienced the dream—no longer as wish fulfillment, but as a responsibility and a course of action.... And, in the end, when he questioned his brothers, asking, "Is father still alive?" it was clear he understood: he did not possess the dream. Joseph had come to embody the dream begun long before him, to live out the dream that started with a ladder...and that would be realized, at last, with Israel's redemption.

**RABBI SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH**<sup>9</sup>... "Zekunim" is the time when one reflects on life accomplishments, looking forward to passing them on to a "ben"—a child worthy of this fund of life-experience.

<sup>7</sup> Nachmanides, or RAMBAN, (1194-1270) was a Sephardic Rabbi, philosopher, physician, Kabbalist, and biblical commentator.

<sup>8</sup> Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz (1937-2020) was an Israeli Chabad Chasidic rabbi, teacher, philosopher, publisher and author.

<sup>9</sup> Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) was a German Orthodox rabbi, author, and philosopher.