

וישב
Vayeishev

אשרינו Ashreinu

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion



Two Forms of Heroism

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Our patriarch's favorite son is put in a perilous position, mere moments from definite death. Just in time, he is saved and in his stead an animal is killed. This description is applicable to two of the most iconic episodes in Sefer Bereishit: Akeidat Yitzchak (Perek 22) and the sale of

Yosef (Perek 37). In addition to the thematic parallels between the two stories there are several striking linguistic allusions which draw our attention to the similarities between the two accounts:

1. Avraham responds to God saying: ויאמר הנני
Yosef responds to Yaakov: ויאמר לו הנני

2. God tells Avraham:

קח נא את בנך... ולך אל ארץ המוריה

Yaakov tells Yosef: לך נא ראה את שלום אחיך

3. When approaching the mountain Avraham raises his eyes: וישא אברהם את עיניו

When Yosef approaches the brothers they raise their eyes: וישאו עיניהם ויראו

4. Avraham sees the location from a distance:

וירא את המקום מרחוק

The brothers see Yosef from a distance:

ויראו אותו מרחוק

5. The angel tells Avraham not to actually harm Yitzchak:

אל תשלח ידך אל הנער

Reuven persuades the brothers not to harm Yosef:

יֵד אֶל תִּשְׁלַח בּוֹ

What message is the Torah conveying by drawing our attention to compare and contrast the episodes of the Akeida and the sale of Yosef?

Rav Yonatan Grossman proposed a theory in an article that appeared in the Tanach journal, Megadim (volume 27). I will present a variation of his approach. Although there are multiple linguistic and thematic connections between the two stories, they present the Avot in completely different contexts. **Avraham in the context of the Akeida is presented as a noble hero, a knight of faith, an active participant who transcends his own personal interests and demonstrates complete allegiance to God.** Yaakov in the context of the sale of Yosef is left in the dark. He is the only person in the story who remains completely clueless that the bloody coat is merely a ruse. **Yaakov is a passive participant who mourns in the background of the story while his other sons along with various bands of travellers take Yosef away from him.**

Perhaps these two separate images of Avraham as the heroic figure and Yaakov as the tragic figure are meant to portray two sides of the same coin of Jewish leadership. Avraham as the founder of the nation acted heroically and **actively founded a new reality of devotion to God and commitment to monotheism. Yaakov however was not creating a new reality but responding to the hurdles that reality often places in front of us. While Avraham serves as a trailblazing model of inventiveness and creativity, Yaakov serves as a reassuring model of resilience and commitment.**

Another contrast between the two episodes is the amount of time that elapses in each story. The Akeida took place over three days; Avraham's anguish was intense but quickly gave way to exhilaration and relief. Yaakov's ordeal, on the other hand, lasted 22 years; the anguish begins in this parsha and only gives way to exhilaration in Vayigash when Yaakov and Yosef are reunited.

By drawing our attention to connect these two stories the Torah may be teaching us that heroic behavior is not limited to those once in a lifetime epiphanous moments like the Akeida that rise and fall in a matter of moments; heroic behavior can also be seen in the how Yaakov manages his grief and guides his family through the quotidian humdrum of extended everyday challenges.

Don't Settle

Jordan Landes ('18)

Rashi teaches that the word Vayesihev, and he settled, implies that Yaakov hoped to live in tranquility. But now, in this week's parsha, Yaakov has to deal with an unsettling event. The sale of Yosef. Why did Yaakov deserve such a punishment in his search for settlement?

In his sefer Kol Dodi, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein gives an interesting answer. In Parshat Lech Lecha at the Brit Bein Habetarim, Hashem told Avraham his children would be strangers in a foreign land for 400 years. The final 210 years of this decree took place in Egypt. The first 190 began at Yitzchak's birth and took place in Canaan, where Yitzchak lived his whole life. Even though Yitzchak lived his whole life in Canaan, the future Israel, it did not yet belong to Bnei Yisrael. Why couldn't more of the decree have been fulfilled in Canaan? What made Yaakov take his family to Egypt?

The answer lies in the words of Rashi. "Yaakov sought to live in tranquility," implies that the feeling of being a stranger was no longer as strong. In resettling in Canaan in the land of his father, Yaakov experienced a feeling of tranquility of no longer being a stranger in a foreign land. And if that is true, the Jews were no longer in exile. So Hashem set in motion these events to force the Jews to Egypt where they would feel out of place and worse.

Until the time that Canaan would become Israel and would belong to us, God did not want us to feel completely comfortable and "settled." True peace and tranquility will only be possible when we are finally and ultimately settled in our homeland.

Gaining from the Loss

Yitzy Lanner ('19)

In this week's parsha, Yaakov gives Yosef special treatment over all of his brothers. And why? Because Yosef was Yaakov's "*Ben Zikkunim*", literally son of his old age. Because of the obvious difficulty, that Binyamin is actually Yaakov's youngest son and not Yosef, Rashi translates that phrase to be commenting on the special Torah relationship that Yaakov shared with Yosef. While Yaakov certainly learned Torah with all of his children, he reserved a special portion of it, the Torah he learned while studying with Shem V'Ever, for Yosef. It was this act more than any other that angered Yosef's brothers.

What was so special about this Torah that Yaakov learned with Shem V'Ever that got the brothers so jealous? More to the point, why, in fact, did Yaakov reserve the Torah from Shem V'Ever for Yosef?

Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky explains that when Yaakov was learning with Shem V'Ever, they taught him a specialized part of the Torah referred to as *Torat HaGalut*, the Torah's guide to a Jew in exile. Like Yaakov, Shem V'Ever did not live in a place with an established Jewish culture or structure. Shem and Ever were surrounded by evil people and negative influences and immersed themselves in the study of *Torat HaGalut*.

When Yaakov stopped to learn with Shem and Ever on his way to the house of Lavan, his duplicitous and two-timing uncle, they shared with him the tools he'd need to religiously and spiritually survive the many years under the influence of Lavan and his evil ways.

Yaakov knew that the *Torat HaGalut* had to be passed down. But with which of his children would it be most appropriately shared? Yosef. Yosef is the one who would lead his family into exile. Yaakov's sons and grandsons would eventually follow Yosef into the foreign land of Egypt. But before they all arrived, Yosef would be braving the elements all on his own.

For that, Yosef would need to be properly equipped with *Torat HaGalut*. Yaakov knew full well why Yosef needed to be the sole heir to this portion of Torah, but the brothers did not, and this caused them to be jealous of Yosef.

Be a Yosef

Libby Weingarten ('19)

Parshat Vayeishev concludes with Yosef sitting in the prison of Pharaoh. Yosef has just concluded interpreting the dreams of his fellow prisoners, the cupbearer and the baker. But why would Yosef care about anybody's dreams at this point? Yosef has been thrown into a pit, sold to traders, and wrongfully imprisoned. He has every reason to ignore or be fearful of any stranger who enters his world. After all, he was even betrayed by his own brothers. However, he does not go in that direction. Instead, he notices the fury burning in the faces of Pharaoh's inmates, asks about their well-being, and even interprets their dreams.

Judaism in general takes advantage of countless opportunities to inform us of the importance of unconditional love and kindness. Notably, Vayikra 19:18 states:

וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ

"you should love your neighbor as yourself."

Additionally, two mishnayot in Pirkei Avot state the same message. In Perek 1:2 the mishna states that the present world stands on three things: Torah, *avodah* (service of God), and *gemilut chasidim* (loving kindness). Later in the same chapter, in mishna 15, we are taught that we must greet every person with a pleasant countenance. The imperative for kindness clearly has roots throughout our texts, but this still does not fully explain Yosef's behavior.

In Bereishit 39:21 the Torah tells us that Yosef had a God-given chesed within him. Rashi explains that the chesed caused his face to radiate similar to the radiating face of a beautiful bride. Aside from this divine inspiration, there was simply no reason for Yosef's demeanor.

As previously mentioned, Yosef had every reason to have his suspicions, especially of those with whom he was sharing a cell. However, this chesed radiated from within and led Yosef to overlook his own mistrust to do an act of kindness for these two men.

What makes Yosef's actions even more remarkable is that the ferocity that he saw in the faces of the baker and cupbearer did not deter him from inquiring about their wellbeing. In Bereishit 40:6 the Torah says:

וַיֵּרָא אֹתָם וְהֵנָּם זֹעֲפִים

“and he saw them and they were sad.”

The word *Zoaffim* is a word used to mean deeply troubled and sad.

It seems that we now have a better idea of the extent of Yosef's actions, approaching two very sad and troubled men in prison at a time when he himself should be looking over his shoulder. Ultimately, Yosef should be our model to unconditionally ask, listen, and interpret.

Imagine it is just after school, classes have concluded, and the day has been a disaster. Your gemara reading was off, you failed your math test, your lunch was cold, you have a headache, and your ipad broke. We have all been in situations like this, frustrated, angry, and a handful of other unpleasant emotions. Imagine somebody notices your dilemma, asks, listens, and interprets. How would that feel?

Be Yosef. Be aware of what the people around you are feeling. Reach out.



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