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The Maimonides School Parsha Newsletter

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וישב

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What We Can Learn from יוסף's Brothers

By Josh Canner

In this week's פרשה, פרשת וישב, a big portion of the story of יוסף and his brother's is told. The beginning of the פרשה discusses the tension between יוסף and his brothers which ultimately leads to מכירת יוסף, the selling of יוסף. The פסוקים and the commentaries on פרק ל"ז of פסוקים ב-ד help us understand that the basis of the brothers' hatred towards יוסף was because they envied יעקב's love and favoritism directed towards him. Right after the תורה tells us why the brothers hated him, the תורה explains that as a result of their hatred, the brothers "לֹא יָכְלוּ דַבֵּר לְיוֹסֵף: לֵשָׁלֵם". ספורה explains this clause to mean that the brothers hated יוסף so much that they could only speak to him about things relating to their household duties or the herds and flocks they were in charge of, but not about regular things that brothers usually converse in- "כמנהג האחים".

Furthermore, רש"י (quoting רבה פ"ד ט) has a rather striking comment on this פסוק. He says that "מִתּוֹךְ גְּנוּתָם לְמַדְנוּ שִׁבְחָם, שֶׁלֹא דִבְרוּ אַחַת בְּפֶה וְאַחַת בְּלֵב" - from something that is told to us which is disgusting about יוסף's brothers, we learn something praiseworthy from them. This is: they didn't speak/act one way and feel a completely different way in their hearts. רש"י is applauding them for acting on the outside how they feel inside, rather than covering up their hatred towards יוסף through being "fake" towards him. This comment has a nice message, but it most definitely does not seem like the time or the place for it. יוסף's brothers planned to kill him, but only due to ראובן and יהודה's influence, they sell him into slavery in a foreign country instead. Why is רש"י praising them right before they are about to commit an atrocity? Is רש"i justifying what they are about to do because their actions teach us a powerful lesson?

To understand where רש"י is coming from, we should look towards the גמרא in מסכת ראש השנה and in מסכת מגילה as helpful context. The גמרא in מסכת מגילה teaches us that we are able to fulfill the מצוה of the blowing of the שופר anytime during the Halachic daytime period on ראש השנה. With this background, the גמרא in מסכת ראש השנה teaches us that someone who heard some of the שופר blowing during the Halachic night time period and part of the שופר blowing during the following Halachic daytime period has not fulfilled his obligation to hear the blowing of the שופר on ראש השנה. The גמרא goes on to explain that he isn't יוצא because he has to hear the whole blowing during the Halachic daytime period. Thus, we see a similar theme between this הלכה and רש"i's comments on our פסוק; Judaism wants us to act in a way that isn't misleading or contradictory of itself - Judaism is guiding us to align how we act with what we believe.

Another source that can help us understand רש"i's view is זומא בן זומא's teaching in the first משנה of the fourth פרק of אבות. He says "אֵיזְהוּ חָכָם, הַלּוֹמֵד מִכָּל אָדָם" - Who is wise? He who learns from every man. I think זומא בן זומא is saying that just because someone isn't completely a good person or is a good person with bad intentions, doesn't mean we can't learn anything from them. I think he is saying a true חכם, like רש"י, is able to learn from the story of יוסף's brother's jealousy towards him that we should reveal our inner feelings rather than keep them to ourselves. May we be זוכה that we should shine our inner traits of goodness and kindness on עם ישראל and the rest of the world.

Where Do Dreams Come From?

By Yochanan Cramer

In this week's פרשה, פרשת וישב, we are introduced to יוסף on a more personal level, describing his relationship with the family. We learn that יוסף's dreams do not come off well to his family. Firstly, יוסף recounts a dream he had, that made his brothers seem like they must be bowing down to him, and his brothers were offended at the thought of bowing down to their younger brother: הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם-מִשּׁוֹל תִּמְשָׁל בָּנוּ. "Do you reign surely over us? Or do you rule surely over us?" Secondly, יוסף later recounts another dream which his father took a similar message from. יעקב says: הֲבֹא נָבֹא אֲנִי וְאַמְךָ וְאַחֶיךָ לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לָךְ אַרְצָה, "Should we, I and your mother and your brothers, surely go to bow to you on the ground?" Shouldn't יוסף be lauded as if he has just received the divine gift of נבואה? Why is he receiving backlash after his dream interpretation?

Rav Alex Israel asks a similar question, addressing the origins of the dreams: "Are these dreams the result of יוסף's personal ambition surfacing in ever more ambitious ways or are these dreams messages from ה' ... Indeed, the dreams never did come true in a literal sense. We never see ALL eleven brothers bow to יוסף. We certainly never see the brothers and יעקב bow down to him. Maybe the dreams are nothing more than a reflection of יוסף's high aspirations?" Since the dreams never come true in a literal sense, as Rav Israel points out, it would make more sense that יוסף's dreams were self-initiated over being divinely initiated, as for the most part, נבואות are supposed to come true.

Later on, he asks a question similar to my second one, addressing the reaction יעקב had to יוסף's second dream: "Why does יעקב berate יוסף? Some commentators suggest that יעקב believed the dreams but, out of concern for family tension, he told יוסף, in front of his brothers, that he thought the dreams were nonsense; but the truth was otherwise. ... however, this exchange between יעקב and his son does raise questions as to the seriousness of these dreams as prophetic messages." Similar to his first point, Rav Israel questions the motive behind telling his family these dreams and uses that to determine the ultimate source of the dreams, which he does not give a clear answer to.

יוסף's dreams were נבואות, not that they would necessarily happen, but rather ה' testing the family's trust in יוסף, despite his having outlandish dreams. Everyone failed, as the brothers only increased their hatred and caused a chain of events that ultimately sent the Jewish people into hundreds of years of slavery in Egypt and יעקב failed to take his favorite son seriously, as he would later fall victim to his brothers' hatred and jealousy. When יהודה gives reasoning for why they should sell, rather than, kill יוסף, he says: כִּי-אַחֵינוּ בְּשָׂרֵנוּ הוּא, "since he is our brother, our own flesh". May we take from this story that we should never have a place in our hearts for hate of our siblings, rather we should have a place for love, since they are "our own flesh".

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