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Vayeishev

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Gematria on the Parshah: Yosef – The Spiritual Heir of Yaakov

By: Moshe Herskovits



In Parshah Vayeishev, the Torah turns its attention to the next generation, the tribes of Israel. Strangely, it introduces the parshah by saying, "These are the descendants of Yaakov: Yosef." Why is Yosef singled out as the continuation of Yaakov? Why not Yehudah, the ancestor of Mashiach?

Chazal explain that Yosef was the primary student of Yaakov, the one who absorbed most of his father's Torah. The gematria of תולדות יעקב 1214 = יוסף, equals יומם ולילה, showing that their connection was rooted in Torah learning. Chazal teach that when a person teaches another Torah, it is as if he gave birth to him. Even the mitzvah of 500 = דעת ה' קרו ורבו, equals דעת ה'. This hints that true spiritual legacy comes from passing on Torah. Yosef was not only Yaakov's physical son, but his spiritual extension.

The Midrash Rabbah adds that everything Yaakov experienced, Yosef experienced as well. Both were hated by their brother(s), both faced threats to their lives, both built their families outside of Eretz Yisrael, and both had powerful dreams. Why was Yosef's life such a mirror of Yaakov's?

The Or HaChaim writes that just as children inherit physical traits, they inherit spiritual challenges and opportunities. Children are often given the chance to complete the spiritual work left unfinished by their parents. In Yosef's case, he was given two major areas to complete for Yaakov.

Yosef and the Completion of Brotherly Peace

Sefer Bereishit contains a repeated pattern of conflict between brothers. Kayin and Hevel. Yishmael and Yitzchak. Esav and Yaakov. Yosef and his brothers. In each of these stories, one brother tries to kill the other. Yosef becomes the first to break this pattern.

The gematria of 156 = יוסף, equals קנאה – jealousy and revenge. His test was to rise above jealousy, avoid revenge, and forgive his brothers for selling him into slavery. This forgiveness allowed him to repair what remained incomplete

in Yaakov's relationship with Esav.

His reward was remarkable. Yosef's sons, Ephraim and Menashe, are the first pair of brothers in the Torah with no recorded conflict, even when the younger is placed before the older. Because Yosef chose peace with his brothers, his children were blessed with peace. This is one reason we bless our children that they should be like Ephraim and Menashe. The gematria reinforces the idea: 726 = שנים שלום, equals מנשה + מנשה.

Yosef and the Completion of Shemirat HaBrit

The Tikkunei Zohar teaches that Yosef also completed Yaakov's unfinished spiritual work in the area of shemirat habrit. Yaakov was tricked into marrying two sisters, and on the wedding night he mistakenly believed he was with Rachel. This created a subtle spiritual imperfection that Yosef was meant to repair.

Yosef's test came through Potiphar's wife. When she attempted to seduce him, he saw the image of his father. Yaakov showed him the Choshen and asked, "Your name is destined to appear on the stones of the breastplate. Are you willing for your name to be erased for a moment of pleasure?" Yosef overcame the temptation by remembering who he was and who he represented.

The Midrash teaches that a person can defeat temptation only by drawing on a stronger source of holiness. Yosef understood that his decisions would shape not only his own life, but also the spiritual destiny of his children.

Sanhedrin 104a says that King Amon, although extremely wicked (he put an idol in the Kodosh HaKedoshim), still merited a portion in the World to Come because he had a righteous son, King Yoshiyahu. The actions of children can redeem their parents. Similarly, the actions of parents bring blessing to their children.

This explains why 726 = שומר עינים, equals אפרים + מנשה. Yosef's decision to guard his eyes did not only protect him — it preserved the moral strength of his children, who grew up in the spiritually dangerous environment of Egypt.

Yosef's Lesson for Us

When we face struggles or temptations, we can draw strength from Yosef HaTzaddik. We can

Refua shleima for Yaakov Moshe ben Fradel Ita

remember the faces of our children, the faces of our loved ones, and the soldiers of Israel standing for us in Eretz Yisrael. Let those faces ignite within us a fire to resist the yetzer hara, to choose what is right, and to bring blessing into our families and communities. Every act of holiness echoes beyond ourselves, shaping the world around us.

What Makes a Leader?

By: Rabbi Avraham Gislason



In truth, there are many qualities that are required for true leadership, such as patience, humility, and seichel. However, in Torah Zayin in Tinyana, Rebbe Nachman speaks about one specific and required trait that every leader must have – rachmanus. Rachmanus is compassion, which is our ability to see the needs of the other, to care about another person in need and to act based on that care to help them.

In order to use rachmanus in a healthy way a person needs to know how to use and channel the feeling of compassion. We don't give a drug addict full access to our bank accounts because the money will actually cause harm to them and to us. We don't give a convicted murderer freedom, because that freedom could result in another victim. Therefore, a leader has know what type of compassion is required for the care and betterment of each individual in need.

Perhaps the most important characteristic, which actually helps us to be able to properly assess the needs of the other, is the trait of mesirus nefesh – self sacrifice. We learn this trait from the ultimate Tzaddik Yesod Olam, Moshe Rabbeinu. After the cheit ha'eigel, Hashem wanted to destroy Klal Yisroel, and make a reboot of the Jewish people from Moshe Rabbeinu alone. Moshe Rabbeinu, in a tremendous display of rachmanus, didn't think about himself whatsoever, did not allow his ego to take over in becoming the progenitor of the new order. Rather, he cast himself aside and told Hashem to either forgive Klal Yisroel, or remove him from the Torah.

We are all leaders in a certain sense, and to a specific extent. Whether we are the head of a family, a workplace, or a certain social circle, we all have a sphere of influence. Employing selflessness, and self sacrifice actually allow us to see the needs of the other without thinking about our own needs or ego. It allows us to give the right type of rach-



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manus to the one we care about. The rachmanus that will help them, as opposed to helping us.

We should ask ourselves, am I helping this person so people will see my actions and hold me in high esteem? If no one was watching would I help to the same extent? If that is the case, then I am not giving of my time or money because I have determined that this is what the person requires. I may not actually be helping the person at all. If I am thinking about myself, my own ego, and how others will see my actions then there is no way to know if it is actually good the person in need at all.

Ashreinu!

The Sale of Yosef

By: Rabbi Adam Law



ואביו שמר את הדבר

It is difficult to understand the family strife leading to the sale of Yosef. How could the brothers do what they did to their brother?

The story of the Avot is about the relationship between G-d and a unique family. The Avot were chosen to become the nation of Yisrael and receive His Torah. To merit this, there would be tests and refinements. The Avot achieved their level by seeking G-d and by performing acts of kindness and righteousness. Some children did not make the cut. At stake in each generation was the inheritance of this privilege.

G-d chose Avraham because of his search for truth. His grit through excruciating trials solidified his mission. But he and Sarah were old and childless, and their light would die with their passing.

Sarah still hoped, so she proposed the idea of having a child through the maidservant Hagar. The boy was Yishmael. That didn't work out.

Eventually, because of their merit, H" promised them their own child. Yitzchak came as a gift from G-d and his path was clear. At the awesome akeida this was confirmed.

Yitzchak got married and he and Rivka had fraternal twins, Esav and Yaakov. They could be a great team: Esav as the master of physical reality and Yaakov, spiritual reality. But Esav's fall and Yaakov's ascension meant Esav was out.

Through his trials and advancements, Yaakov becomes complete (לג:יח) and merits to become Yisrael.

However, when his own sons saw what had happened between Yaakov and Esav they were concerned.

The problem goes back to the switch of Leah for Rachel at Yaakov's wedding. Since Leah was technically Yaakov's first wife, her first son Reuven should get the firstborn status. Yaakov however felt that he was duped and it rightfully belongs to Yosef, firstborn of Rachel. In addition, Yosef's prodigious talents reminded him of himself. Yaakov gave the multicolored coat and his deepest Torah to Yosef, proving his selection.

But the sons of Leah saw Yosef as a usurper and a danger. He would tattle on them for perceived misdeeds, and brag of future greatness. Could they be cast aside like Esav in Yosef's ascension?

This was their existential crisis and informed the sons' regrettable actions in the sale of Yosef. However, it was a misunderstanding. Since Yaakov was complete, no son would be expelled. All of Israel has a portion in the inheritance.

ואביו שמר את הדבר

And their father guarded the matter

It was improper that Yaakov waited for the argument to resolve itself. His fear of broaching the matter meant that he did not get clarity on what his sons were up to. His hesitation can be interpreted as a lack of fatherly leadership.

This family could not work together yet to create a kingdom. The correction (tikun) for this disconnection is for all of Israel to be concerned for each other. In parshas Vayigash this is what happens in the end. The brothers are able to put themselves aside and take responsibility for their family. This is the redemption of Israel.

Who turned out the lights?

By: Rabbi Joshua Kaller



Why was it that, of all the things the Greeks looked to destroy, they focused primarily on the Menorah? Why was the Menorah the key piece in their strategic spiritual warfare? And furthermore, why is it that although the military victory itself was one of the most tremendous miracles of the entire Chanukkah story, the Menorah nevertheless takes the central place as the main miracle people highlight? Why is that?

The answer is that the Greeks represent darkness. As we know, the Midrash Rabbah describes the four exiles—Persia, Media, Greece, and the Roman Empire of Edom—and explains that choshech, darkness, corresponds to Greece. The Greeks understood that as long as the Jewish people remain vibrant and illuminated with the power of Torah and mitzvos, and with the deep recognition that G-dliness operates throughout the world, there is a Divine guardianship and

protection that keeps the Jewish people impenetrable to both military and spiritual attack.

But if you can extinguish the light, you can bring destruction. If you can bring darkness, you can weaken the Jewish people at their core. The symbol of this attack—the centerpiece of their strategy—was the Menorah. Their message was clear: We want to darken the eyes and blemish the spiritual consciousness of the Jewish people. Everything they set out to do was meant to drown us in spiritual confusion and distance us from our relationship with the Creator, from the awareness of His omnipresence and His involvement in every detail of a Jew's life.

This assault on the mind, heart, and body of the Jew was expressed in their attack on the Menorah.

And so too, the Menorah itself represents Jewish light. It represents our connection to the Divine. As long as we remain connected to that light, we have the strength to fight the darkness. This is one of the reasons why the Menorah takes such a central place in the Chanukah narrative. As the Nesivos Shalom, the great Slonimer Rebbe, explains, the Menorah is one of the key strategies, one of the essential points through which the Jewish people are able to move forward in life and defend themselves from the ever-present darkness surrounding them.

In the small yet powerful luminescence of the Menorah is the recognition that Hashem is at the center of every experience, every moment, and every direction of our lives. That is true light. And it is symbolically expressed every time we look at the Menorah.

This is also one of the reasons we illuminate the Menorah specifically in the darkness, even though the Menorah in the Beis HaMikdash was actually lit by day. The mitzvah of Chanukkah is performed at night to demonstrate that we are engaged in a fight against darkness. It is not only about honoring or commemorating the Menorah that was lit during the day in the Temple; it is about declaring that no matter how pervasive the darkness may seem, we will fight it, and with Hashem's help, we will overcome.

One Thought for Shabbos

Chazal teach that Yosef's refusal to sin with Potiphar's wife changed the spiritual destiny of Klal Yisrael. One moment of inner strength can echo for generations. Yosef reminds us that even small choices, made quietly and privately, can transform our lives and the lives of those who come after us.

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