

## **Yosef ... was a shepherd with his brothers by the flock. (37:2)**

As parents, we have an awesome responsibility to infuse our children with proper *middos*, character traits, coupled with *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, and an abiding commitment to Torah study and *mitzvah* performance. As parents, we are our children's first and primary mentors. The *rebbeim* and *moros* that we choose for them are a reflection of our standards. Last, the joy in *mitzvah* observance that we present will have a lasting impression upon our children as they journey forward in the world. *Horav Nissim Yagen, zl*, relates the story of two American families who, on the outside, maintained similar lifestyles, until their children grew up and chose contrasting paths: one remained observant, while the other married out of the faith. Both boys had studied in the same elementary school and *yeshivah* high school. One became a *rav*, while the other *r"l* apostatized himself.

Both fathers rose early to daven *vasikin*, early *minyana*, dressed the part of observant Jews, and were observant in all facets of *Yiddishkeit*. The father whose son converted came to his *rav* and, after relating the tragedy that had befallen his family, asked for a reason: "Rebbe, tell me why my good friend and neighbor merited to have his son become a rabbi, while my son, who became a physician, converted out of the religion to satisfy his wife."

The *rav* replied, "I believe I know the reason. Both you and your neighbor did the same things, but it was your individual attitudes, which your sons sensed, that created the difference. Years later, your attitude manifested itself in your son turning away from Judaism. When you arose at 5:00 a.m. to pray, it was unquestionably not easy, but you overcame your weakness, your desire to sleep another hour, and jumped out of bed prepared to serve your Creator. When your son saw this, he asked, 'Daddy, why do you get up so early?' You responded, 'What can I do? I must get up. It is an atonement for our sins.'

"Afterwards, when your son saw you putting on *Tefillin* and reciting the *brachah*, blessing, with a pinched face, your son asked why you were doing this. You replied, 'We must put on *Tefillin*. We have no choice in the matter. That is what Hashem has commanded us to do.' You did everything because you were forced to do it; you had to do it. So your son developed the idea that his father was unfortunate, doing everything because he was forced to do it; he had no mind of his own. Thus, the moment your son grew up, he said that he would not have a miserable life like his father. So, now he has nothing!

"Your neighbor, on the other hand, had a different attitude. When his son asked why he rose so early in the morning, he responded with a bright and cheerful face, 'To serve Hashem! I am so happy to serve my Creator. I cannot wait to go to *shul* to pray to Him, to thank Him for all that He does for us.' When they arrived in *shul* and his son observed his father putting on *Tefillin*, he asked once again, 'Why? What are you doing?' and the father would reply once again, 'I am becoming one with Hashem.' These words made the boy long for the day when he could become one with Hashem.

“The big difference between you and your neighbor is that you told your son, ‘I have to do this.’ As a result, at the earliest opportunity, your son demonstrated his disinterest. Your neighbor imparted a different message. He said, ‘I love to do this; I want to do this.’ Why should a son not want to do what his father loves to do?”

The story is not new. The lesson certainly is not. The purpose of this preamble is to shed light on an anomaly concerning the primary focus of the next four *parshiyos*: Yosef *HaTzaddik*. While, indeed, Yaakov *Avinu* and the *Shivtei Kah* also have starring roles, the anomaly that surrounds Yosef is the statement issued by *Chazal*: *Hu Yosef mitchilah v’ad sof*, “He is Yosef from beginning to end.” (*Sifri Devarim*, cited by *Rashi Shemos* 1:5) This means that Yosef *HaTzaddik* maintained his saintliness, his pristine character, from the time he was at home, as his father’s *chavrusa*, study partner, throughout the various ordeals in his life, until he became viceroy in Egypt; he was consistently the same Yosef!

Let us analyze this statement. Yosef, the son of royalty, the son of Yaakov, the apex of aristocracy, was sold as chattel to a group of Arabs. He was then sold as a menial slave to a common Egyptian. If this would have happened to the average person, he might have begun questioning his faith. How could this have happened to him? He was a *tzaddik* who had done nothing wrong. To be treated in such a crass manner is bad enough, but, when one is taken from such a spiritual summit and placed as a slave in a base and immoral environment, it is a difficult challenge to one’s faith. Yet, Yosef remained the same righteous Jew in Egypt as when he had been a shepherd living an idyllic Torah life.

Furthermore, when, as viceroy, Yosef was exposed to the fame and glitter of Egyptian society, he was not blinded by the blandishments of wealth and fame; it did not go to his head. After all of life’s troubles, Yosef was blessed with two sons. One would think that some of his embitterment would have crept into the naming of his sons. Absolutely not. The name that he gave to each son expressed his gratitude to Hashem.

The average person might counter that this is why Yosef was called a *tzaddik*. He was able to maintain his spiritual stature despite the various challenges. That would be true if he had been called a *tzaddik* only at the end of his life. What *Chazal* teach us is that he remained the same *tzaddik* after enduring all of these troubles and challenges as when he was young. What gave him the fortitude to not only withstand everything that had been thrown at him, but to go on to offer gratitude to Hashem?

It was his mother. Rachel *Imeinu* had two children, but raised only one: Yosef. Our Matriarch had a similar life, except for the ending. She did not become viceroy of Egypt; she did not ascend to fame and fortune. She finally gave birth to her second child – and died. At first, things appeared to be going her way. She was destined to marry Yaakov. At the very last minute, in her attempt to shield her sister Leah *Imeinu* from disgrace, Rachel switched and gave Leah the opportunity to become Yaakov’s wife. One would think that this act of selflessness would have incurred incredibly good

fortune for her. At least, she should have had a houseful of children, but that did not happen. In fact, she was barren, while her sister had six sons! In the end, Rachel did not even gain entrance to the *Meoras HaMachpeilah*. That was, however, Rachel's distinction. Did Rachel complain? Was her cheerful demeanor impugned? No, she was Rachel *Imeinu*, she accepted everything that came her way as an expression of Hashem's will. This is how she lived, and this is how she died. It was this form of spiritual equanimity which she conveyed to her son, Yosef. Everything is Hashem's will: the (what appears as) good, as well as (what appears as) bad. We take it as it comes and accept it, because this is the will of Hashem. Rachel *Imeinu* taught her son well.