

These are the chronicles of Yaakov: Yosef. (37:2)

While the word *toldos* is usually translated as offspring, in this *pasuk* it means chronicles, since the only offspring of Yaakov *Avinu* that the *pasuk* mentions is Yosef. *Rashi* explains why the Torah applies the term *toldos* to Yosef more so than to any of his brothers. First, Yaakov worked for Lavan in order to get Rachel *Imeinu*, Yosef's mother, as his wife. Second, Yosef's countenance closely resembled that of Yaakov. Third, whatever happened to Yaakov (so to speak), happened to Yosef: Yaakov was hated by his brother; so, too, was Yosef (obviously for different reasons); Yaakov's brother sought to end his life; it was not much different with Yosef. The Torah is not a story book, and it does not waste space retelling various occurrences, regardless of their relationship to the present. Thus, *Rashi* recalls Yaakov's past and its similarity to that of Yosef, to teach us why Yosef is that *toladah*, offspring, of Yaakov who carried on his father's tradition, his legacy. While this explains why *Rashi* draws a parallel between Yaakov and Yosef, it does not clarify why, if father and son have similar life experiences, it indicates that this son – to the exclusion of his brothers – is his father's spiritual successor. Since when do occurrences in one's life play such critical significance that resemblances in life's experiences between father and son create an everlasting bond?

Horav Baruch Dov Povarsky, Shlita, quotes *Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl*, who asks why Hashem created the dynamics of the world (Hashem is the dynamics of the world), such that people have individual experiences, varied cultures and lifestyles: some are wealthy; others are poor; some are blessed with good health, while others suffer from varied illnesses. He explains that individuals are on different spiritual planes, thus requiring that each individual be "outfitted" with his unique "baggage" to sustain him spiritually and to enable him to navigate through life, so that he is able to serve Hashem to the best of his abilities. Obviously, one who is born with incredible acumen will be expected to excel in his Torah erudition. One who is challenged physically will have aspects of his spiritual accoutrements in excess, to help him to overcome his challenges. There is a balance, with Hashem complementing each individual with attributes, experiences, and even handicaps, which help him achieve his goal as set by Heaven.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* applies this idea to explain *Chazal's* statement (*Pirkei Avos* 4:9), "He who fulfills the Torah amid poverty will one day fulfill the Torah amid wealth." In his *Ruach Chaim* commentary, *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl*, posits that becoming wealthy is not a reward for one who serves Hashem, despite the fact that he is living in abject poverty; rather, each of us is to fulfill the Torah amid the various challenges that are "thrown" at us. An individual who triumphs over a lesser challenge is soon "elevated" to another status, in which the challenges are consistent in tune with his newly-elevated status. As he progresses from challenge to challenge, they increase in difficulty. Therefore, the *Tanna* teaches us that once one has successfully served Hashem despite the challenge of poverty, Hashem will elevate/intensify his challenge, so that he will be able to serve Him despite the challenge of wealth (which is considered a greater challenge). It is easier to serve Hashem when one has nothing, than to contend with the inclination to hoard one's wealth and not spend his money wisely to the benefit of others.

Returning to the original question, we now understand that life's experiences are not random, disconnected occurrences that "just happen." Everything has a purpose and a reason. It is all commensurate with one's spiritual level. Every person undergoes circumstances that enable him to achieve greater spiritual ascendancy. Therefore, when two people's life experiences are the same, when the challenges that they confront resemble one another, it indicates that they resemble one another spiritually as well. Thus, if Yosef looked like Yaakov and his life's experiences were similar to Yaakov's, then we must view them as having much more than an external, physical resemblance. They are one and the same. Yosef and Yaakov had much more than a physical kinship; their challenges also paralleled one another, catalyzing their physical conformity. Yaakov did not have the same type of relationship with his other sons, because they were not spiritually like him.