

And Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his sons... His brothers saw that it was he whom their father loved most of all his brothers, so they hated him... So his brothers were jealous of him... They conspired against him to kill him. (37:1,3,4,11,18)

Writing about the lives of our *Avos* and *Imahos*, Patriarchs and Matriarchs, is extremely difficult and must be done with great trepidation. To present them on a mortal level equal to us not only denigrates them, but it is ludicrous. In the *pesichah*, preface, to *Leket Sichos Mussar* (the *shmuessen*, ethical discourses, of *Horav Yitzchak Aizik Sher, zl*, *Rosh Yeshivas Slabodka*, and son-in-law of the *Alter, zl*, of Slabodka), the *Rosh Yeshivah* observes that our approach toward studying Torah narrative dates back to when we were young children in *cheder*, elementary school. The terminology and nuances that served us then do not apply as our intellect matures. He quotes the *Chovas HaLevavos* (*Shaar Cheshbon Hanefesh*), “Therefore, do not be content with what has been formed in your mind in the beginning of your learning of the difficult matters and the deep reasons; rather, it is proper for you to start at the age of mature intellect and understanding to examine the Book of G-d and the Book of the *Neviim*, like someone who never learned one letter of them.” *Girsa d’yankessa*, the Torah we learned in our youth, remains rooted within us. While this is a great spiritual benefit, it can impede our depth of understanding the Torah’s narrative if we do not “graduate” to intellectual learning worthy of our matured intellects.

Thus, when we approach the narrative of the *parshiyos* that conclude *Sefer Bereishis*, we must take a step back and realize that the story of Yosef and his brothers and the ensuing events that occur are much deeper than our “kindergarten” intellects have penetrated. Hashem guided and orchestrated everything that took place. Hatred and envy, the words which the Torah uses to describe the tenuous relationship that marked the strife in Yaakov *Avinu*’s home, are not the same envy and hatred to which we, mere mortals, are accustomed. They go much deeper. Hashem placed in Yaakov’s heart a profound love for Yosef, which was greater than that which he manifested toward the other brothers. Hashem also had the brothers take note of this change and react to it. This is what Hashem wanted, because this was the way in which He catalyzed Yaakov’s eventual descent to Egypt, which would be the precursor of the Egyptian bondage and eventual redemption some two hundred years later. In turn, the redemption from Egypt led to *Klal Yisrael*’s acceptance of the Torah and the subsequent induction as the people of Hashem.

This was the Master Plan. As such, we study these *parshiyos* as lessons in pure, unvarnished Heavenly Providence, acknowledging that we are mere spectators in a scenario guided by Hashem for a purpose that is beyond our grasp, but will conclude with the Giving of the Torah. All the questions are answered – nay – there should be no questions, because we do not question Hashem. After all, we are mortals, His creatures; we should learn and seek guidance, but, as the *Chovas HaLevavos* exhorts: We should do so as intelligent mortals – not like *cheder* children.

A well-known *chassidic* tale (cited in *Nitzitzos*, by *Horav Yitzchak Hershkowitz, Shlita*) encapsulates this idea. The *Yehudi HaKadosh*, *zl*, of Peshischa traveled to his saintly *Rebbe*, the *Chozeh*, *zl*, *m'Lublin*. It was during a bitter Polish winter, and the frigid stormy weather had delayed him, to the point that he found himself on *Purim* night in a small town. He immediately sought out the local *shtiebl*, so that he could *daven* with a *minyán* and hear the reading of the *megillah*. The *megillah* reader was the local *chazzan*, a fine, simple Jew who was versed in the cantillation notes of the *megillah* reading. He was no scholar; he was certainly not the *Chozeh*.

As he read the story of Haman and Achashveirosh, Mordechai and Esther, the *Yehudi HaKadosh* made remarks concerning the foolish Achashveirosh, the evil Haman, the holy Mordechai and deeply devoted Esther. The worshippers were taken aback. "Is this the first time you hear about the *Purim* story and the individuals involved?" (This is the impression he gave with his play-by-play comments.)

The *Yehudi* explained, "When my holy *Rebbe* read the *megillah*, I heard Heavenly sounds and thunder, as the deep secrets and Heavenly Providence emerged from each and every word. This time, I heard a story concerning a foolish king, whose evil minister convinced him to have the Jews murdered. A righteous man in Shushan, together with his niece who was the foolish king's wife, was able to prevent this decree from achieving fruition. Truthfully, I never heard the 'narrative' in the manner it was being chanted today." It all depends on how we approach the narrative: Is it a Bible story or *divrei Elokim Chaim*, words of the Living G-d?

Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu Rabba (25:) teaches, "One is obligated to ask, 'When will my actions reach those of my forebears?'" One would think that it is unfathomable for the Jew of the twenty-first century to think that he can achieve a spiritual level akin to that of the Patriarchs. We have just explained that the Torah narrative concerning our ancestors is beyond our grasp. If we cannot even understand their spiritual level, how can we possibly dream of achieving it? Simply put, we might not be able to parallel their *kum v'asei*, active *mitzvos* and accomplishments; we can, however, try to guard ourselves *b'shev v'al'taaseh*, in those areas in which they desisted from acting negatively. Our inclination drives us to act out our negative desires. By refraining and controlling ourselves, we are emulating our forebears.

Alternatively, it means that we model and seek to emulate the way of life and positive acts of our forebears who demonstrated their extraordinary character development. Clearly, we are not as refined, but why not use their positive activities as the lodestar by which we navigate our own lives? *Horav Shmuel Salant, zl*, was consulted by a man who asked the following: "My son emigrated to America, where, within a short interval, he reneged on the Torah and *mitzvos* with which we raised him in Yerushalayim. He sends me money on a regular basis, because he is acutely aware of the material hardship we confront regularly in Yerushalayim. I do not feel comfortable using this money, since I am certain it was earned by working on *Shabbos*. I wish to return the money to him."

Rav Shmuel responded with a *dvar Torah*, “When Yaakov *Avinu* escaped from Eisav, his evil brother dispatched his son, Elifaz, to kill him. When Elifaz caught up with Yaakov, the Patriarch pleaded for his life. ‘What can I do concerning my father’s instructions?’ Elifaz asked. Yaakov replied, ‘Take all of my possessions, thereby leaving me bereft of my material wealth. As such, I will be a poor person who is considered as good as dead. You can then report to your father that you accomplished your mission.’” Rav Shmuel asked, “Why did Yaakov not attempt to impress upon Elifaz that *retzichah*, murder, is prohibited? He was Elifaz’s *Rebbe*, and Elifaz would have listened. The reason is that Yaakov observed how much Elifaz wanted to carry out the *mitzvah* of honoring his father. Yaakov did not want to deprive his student, who was otherwise bent on killing him, from fulfilling this *mitzvah*.

“It is unfortunate that your son fell prey to the material blandishments which abound in America. He still, however, has the one *mitzvah* of caring for his father. Is it fair to deprive him of this *mitzvah*?”