

Yisrael loved Yosef best of all his sons, he was a child of his old age. (37:3)

The Torah teaches us that Yaakov *Avinu's* love for Yosef exceeded his love for his other sons. On the surface, this favoritism seems to have been the precursor of the tragic strife that ultimately led to *mechiras* Yosef. One wonders why Yaakov, who personally knew the pitfalls of partiality and the resulting discord that can reign between siblings, not have taken a different route upon raising his children. The simple, straightforward explanation is that Yaakov's love for Yosef was not about Yosef, but about his mother, Rachel *Imeinu*. We all remember the story well. Yaakov came to Charan, met Rachel who was his *bashert*, Heavenly-designated mate, but, at the last second, her swindler father, Lavan, made a switch. As a result, Leah *Imeinu* married Yaakov with Rachel's blessings and participation. Yaakov married Rachel after Leah, who was blessed with children. Rachel, however, did not immediately enter the motherhood phase of her marriage. She ultimately conceived Yosef and Binyamin, leaving this world during Binyamin's birth. It is therefore understandable that the longing Yaakov had for Rachel was translated into his love for her son, Yosef.

Perhaps, we may suggest a deeper dimension concerning Yaakov's relationship with Yosef. It is hard to believe that our Patriarch was influenced by *ben zekunim*, son of his old age, or Yosef's brilliance and extremely favorable physical appearance. Their relationship went much deeper. *Chazal* (*Berachos* 60A) teach that originally it was Leah who conceived Yosef, while Rachel's first conception was Dinah. Concerned that Rachel would have only one son (Binyamin) while Bilhah and Zilpah each had two sons, Leah prayed that the fetuses be miraculously switched. Hashem accepted her prayer, and Yosef was born to Rachel.

Thus, Yosef was, in a profound way, the child of both Matriarchs: Leah and Rachel. Rachel carried and gave birth to him; Leah conceived him and prayed that he be born to Rachel. Yosef embodied the combined legacy of the two *Imahos*, uniting their spiritual efforts in his very being. Furthermore, he was the product of an extraordinary act of *chesed*, to which Heaven acquiesced. I think this is a reason to favor him over the brothers, who were the products of one Matriarch.

Yosef represented the unifying force between Rachel and Leah, and as such, was destined to be a unifying leader of the *shevatim*. He symbolized the potential to integrate the various streams of the *Shivtei Kah* into one harmonious entity. As such, he was perfectly suited to be a leader. A leader who is unable to unify his people will not be effective and will probably not retain his position for very long. Much of Yosef's actions were misconstrued. When he related the dreams to his brothers, they rejected the part where everyone bowed down to him, viewing his message as one of superiority and a desire to lord over them. In truth, his message was about the family's shared mission and the need for cohesion. He had the DNA of unity within him and he felt that he should capitalize on it. Sadly, the brothers did not see it this way. In the end, the one who was suspected of attempting to destroy the family was himself to be the foundation upon which the redemption

would be built. We must look beneath the layers of ambiguity to reveal the truth. Otherwise, we will continue groping in the dark.