

Parshas Vayeishev

How do we deal with the fact that the brothers, based on the simple explanation of the posuk, “hated” Yosef?¹ Perhaps, because of what needed to transpire as part of the journey of the Jews to Egypt, prior to receiving the Torah. Yosef stated his dreams in front of his father and brothers, then the next posuk, the brothers are gone, and then Yakov sends Yosef to the fields. Dreams are a level of prophecy, that the Alter Rebbe explains, is the storyline of opposites, that is anything can happen in a dream. Yosef’s dreams therefore are about some prophecy, and something greater than the narrative at the moment.

There are so many questions. They hated yosef perhaps because he was going to go down to Egypt, perhaps they could have stopped it by killing him? Was it the brothers who sold Yosef? in posuk 28 it was Midianite people who sold Yosef for 20 pieces of silver to the Ishmelites. Midian is Avraham’s son from Keturah, and Yishmael the other tribes are also described earlier, who is another son of Avraham. It is as if the entire family is involved in the sale of Yosef (according to mepharshim it is to show that Yosef was sold multiple times). But Based on the simple reading of the pesukim, the brothers seemed to be contemplating something that the Midianites, and the Yishmaelim enacted- again they are related to the brothers. Of all the nations who were trading slaves- it was a related party. Also, why does the posuk tell us what the Yishmaelim were trading

various goods, and that their destination would be Egypt?

It's as if the brothers were going to trade with the Yishameilim for their other products and Yosef would just be mixed in, whereas the Midianites were actual traffickers and removed Yosef from the pit. Furthermore, if the brother’s contemplated the sale, then there ought to have been confirmation from the Torah that the brother’s received profit for the transaction, instead, all we end up seeing is that 20 pieces of silver were given to the Midianites, and it was the Midianites who pulled Yosef from the pit.

Yosef then ends up in Egypt, where he is sold into a royal house, Potiphar, an obvious part of the narrative to have Yosef end up, like in is prophetic dreams, as a leader who others will bow to. This dream thematically is like Yosef’s grandmother’s prophecy about the twins in her womb, that the young will conquer the old, here Yosef is the youngest, and he will be bowed to. Yakov as well plays a role here. First with the dreams, he was silent. Next, he took a particular liking to Yosef, by giving him the coat, and finally, he sends Yosef into “harms” way knowing the brothers contemplated endangering Yosef, and Yosef ran to do the job as Rashi explains, expeditiously. Why would Yakov knowingly send Yosef to the brothers, firstly if there is potential danger, but generally, to check in on them?

The answers to these questions could be as follows: The brothers didn’t ‘actually’ hate

¹ Radak: ולא יכלו דברו לשלום, any conversation with Joseph did not revolve around peacefully discussed

matters of common interest but concerned only matters of dispute between them.

Yosef, rather they hated the fact that he was the brother who prophesied about the next step in the family's journey, that is down to Egypt, as per the promise Avraham received in the Bris Ben Hamisarim. One can posit from the gemara in Bava Basra², that the actions were hated. Which is evidenced by Rashi's explanation on the rhetorical question the brother's ask, which "and we will see what will be of his dreams..." (37:20). Meaning if he is done away with, will the dreams be fulfilled? Perhaps, this explains their jealousy, which was that they wanted the merit of being the tribe who goes to Egypt and paves the way for the next era in Jewish history. Furthermore, Yosef may not have known that he was going to be sent down to Egypt (he tells this over to the baker and sommelier in jail in Egypt-that he wasn't sure why he was sold), perhaps the brother's didn't like the plan, or want to make sure that what was supposed to happen would.

Next, the traveling caravan first speaks of Ishmaelites, who were carrying exotic goods. It then tells us that they were going to Egypt. If the brother's wanted to be rid of Yosef, why would we care who the nationals were, what they were carrying, and where they were going.? Furthermore, a band of Ishmaelites, would be cousins to the brothers, as they are from the same grandfather. Next, Yehuda suggests the

sale, as a profit would seem ideal, over killing flesh and blood. Then the posuk tells us that Midianite businesspeople took Yosef out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites for 20 pieces of silver, who took Yosef to Egypt. Where were the Midianites, why were they there? Furthermore, Midianites are cousins as much as Ishmaelites are too the brothers, and Midian is from Ketura, so they are either the full brother, or half brother, of Ishmael, and Yitzchak, making them similarly related. Why is the family involved here?

What it seems like from the posuk, the only slave trading, was between the Midianites and the Ishmaelites. Earlier as well, when it stated that the brothers went to watch their father's sheep near Shechem (prior to Yakov sending Yosef on his mission), there are 2 dots on the word "Es" (37:12) as Rashi explains that we shouldn't think the brother's went for their father, rather they went for their own indulgence, perhaps in what the Ishmaelites were selling (such as the spices), which is why they went to Dosom, and not Shechem as the posuk says. Perhaps the sought the Ishmaelites, and the Midianites to get Yosef down to Egypt was required per Yosef's dream of being the leader who the rest of the family served, and a continuation of the Bris Bein Habisarim. Rashi, explains on "shomar es hadavar" (37:11), that Yakov was waiting

² Bava Basra 123a The Gemara comments: And her desire not to marry Esau is the basis of that which is written: "And the Lord saw that Leah was hated, and He opened her womb" ([Genesis 29:31](#)). What is the meaning of "hated"? If we say that she was literally hated, is it possible? The verse there did not speak to the disparagement of even a non-kosher animal, so did the verse here speak to the disparagement of the righteous? Rather, the Holy One, Blessed be He, saw that the behavior of Esau

was hated by her, and therefore: "And He opened her womb." On Genesis 29:31 **וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי־שִׂנְאָהּ לְאֵה** **וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת־רִחְמָהּ וַיְהִי לָהּ עֶקְרָה**: The LORD saw that Leah was unloved and He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. Leah knew according to Sforno that she was barren, so could fulfill role of Lavan, to try and stop the lineage from being precipitated. She was righteous in her actions.

for the matter (of the dreams) to come true- which Rashi explains from Yishayahu, which refers additionally to a Messianic era. Yosef was the chosen tribe, and we see this in last parsha, as Rashi explains, that only once Yosef was born, was Yakov able to return to “his father’s land” and not be fearful of Esav, because Yosef is involved in conquering Esav.

The involvement of Midian³ perhaps negates the Halachik issue of Shemos 21:16, about the capture and sale of a man, that is liable for death⁴. But the man, must be stolen, and paid for, which Midian did, not the brothers (although they suggested it). As well, perhaps if you sell/give the captive to a family member, is that considered selling, when compared to an open market sale. The Midianites are called traders, perhaps so that it legitimizes the transaction⁵ (but they were nevertheless family to Yosef- as well Moshe’s future father-in-law Yisro was a midianite). (This is all an explanation that is not quite in line with Rashi on the various transactions that took place, and that it was the brothers who did sell Yosef-although we don’t know how much they were paid for the transaction presumably less than 20 silver pieces, as Midianites would have had to make a profit. Also, it is curious that the amount Yosef was sold for is included in the posuk, why does it matter? Finally, the law of sale of a person that is liable to death is in singular, not plural, which the brothers

were a group. This is explained through the law of Eglarufah that Yakov had been teaching Yosef.)

Reuven’s reaction to the sale, is explained by Rashi over the fact that he was not present at the time of the sale. Rashi explains because he was on duty to serve his father. If this is the case, the why would Yakov send Yosef to observe the situation of the brother’s presumably one of them was around to report, and sending Yosef would be a moot action, unless there was a purpose, namely, to begin the process of sending Yosef to Egypt.

Yosef may have not known he was being sent, like Yitzchak didn’t “know” he was going to be offered a sacrifice at the Akeida (the language of Hineni- commitment is the same between Avraham, Yitzchak, and now Yosef). Which is why Reuven tore his clothes, as he, like the brother’s may have detested the fact of whether Yosef was ready to go down to Egypt or not, or whether he was the right brother to go. The next part of the story, where they brought the bloodied tunic to Yakov, Rashi explains that Yakov lost his divine vision, yet Yitzchak knew that Yosef was still alive. Once Yosef was set into motion, there was no more meddling. Perhaps the brother’s wanted to show Yakov they “got the job done” but not as Yakov necessarily intended, to leave the rest up to Hashem (we know from previous parshas that Yakov was incredibly nuanced

³ Who are quite an adversary of the Jews in ancient history- Balak conspired with Midian to “bring down the Jews”. The Haftora for Balak from Micah 5:6-6:8 recounts the remnant of Jacob, it refers to the history, of Yakov and that the dangers will be eliminated)

⁴ And related to the claim of Turnsurfus on the R’ Yishmael of the 10 martyrs.

⁵ And perhaps the fact that R’Yishmael was punished in replacement to the brothers, although, the angels don’t directly answer that they are in the stead, rather they say, this is the decree from behind the veil, and when pushed, Hashem responds that He would overturn the world. Meaning the response would seem not to question the story as it took place.

in all his actions to ensure the right outcome would ensue, but at this point Hashem needed to take over.

The chapter ends with the Midianites (who according to Rashi were entrusted from the Ishmaelites) taking Yosef to Egypt, and delivering on their mission, and not just to any house, rather to Potiphar, a high-ranking executive, in Pharaoh's kingdom, which shows on the Divine Providence, and the beginning of the fulfillment of Yosef's dreams. The remaining mourning and prayers, would be because Yakov lost his prophetic vision, and he was perhaps praying on Yosef's behalf.

When the Torah recounts the narrative of Yosef again, he is described as having been sold by Ishmaelites. As well, the juxtaposition of the story of Yehuda and Tamar to Yosef and Potiphar are explained by Rashi (39:1), this is important for a side explanation connecting Yehuda and the Davidic dynasty, and Yosef and the Mashiach ben Yosef.

Yosef is thrown into jail, where he encounters Pharaoh's baker and sommelier. He interprets their dreams. Yosef says something interesting to the sommelier who he predicted would live, which was to remember Yosef, and he explains that he was kidnapped (supporting the fact that he may have not necessarily known his mission yet), and he put faith in the servants of Pharaoh, as the parsha concludes, that the sommelier forgot Yosef. Rashi explains, Yosef was required to spend 2 more years in jail for not having faith in Hashem, rather relying on the people. Meaning everything that is unfolding is for purpose.

My final point to support and help tie all the answers together is to explain the connection of this week's parsha to the Haftora which comes from Amos, Chapter 2:6 -3:8. The first part of the Haftora describes the sins of Yehuda, and the fact that the brothers could have made mistakes, but chapter 3 states: "hear this prophecy that Hashem has spoken concerning you, Children of Israel, concerning the entire family that I brought up from the land of Egypt..." and the prophecy continues whereby Hashem asks rhetorical questions such as "do two people walk together unless they had been arranged to do so?" Meaning that nothing is a coincidence, especially regarding this family of Yakov, and the going down to Egypt. It had to happen. As posuk 7 in Chapter 3 says: "For Hashem will not do anything unless He has revealed His secret to his servants and prophets" (this would simply mean to heed the words of the warnings of the prophets to repent) but as applied to this parsha we clearly see that Hashem is directly involved in every aspect of the story of the brothers and the sale of Yosef.