

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

*This weekly sheet is brought to you by **Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman** of the **New West End United Synagogue** in conjunction with **Shapell's/Darché Noam***

PARSHAT VAYIGASH

DVAR TORAH: BEING A FORMER SLAVE

According to the author of the Meshech Chochmah, Harav Meir Simchah of Dvinsk, זצ"ל (1843–1926), when the Egyptians tried to sell themselves to Pharaoh as slaves, Yosef refused. In the second year of the great famine in Egypt, the nation came to Yosef, and said, “Buy us and our land in exchange for bread; and we and our land will be slaves to Pharaoh ...” (Bereishit 47:19). But, the Torah, in the next verse, reports, “Yosef bought all of the land of Egypt on behalf of Pharaoh ...” Apparently he did not take them up on their offer to buy them as slaves. Why not?

The Meshech Chochmah explains that Yosef abhorred acquiring another person as a slave and ‘controlling another to their detriment’ (based on Kohelet 8:9).” he therefore said, “I have bought you today, and your land for Pharaoh,” (Bereishit 47:23). Their lands were permanently acquired, but they were only temporarily hired as workers – today. After he distributed seeds for planting, they once again explicitly requested, “You have revived us. Let us find favor in my master’s eyes and we will become slaves to Pharaoh” (Bereishit 47:25). But he did not buy them as slaves. Instead, he transferred everyone to cities instead of leaving them on the plots of land they previously owned. This made it clear that the lands were government owned.

Harav Yehudah Cooperman (1929 2016, Israel) זצ"ל, in his footnotes on the Meshech Chochmah, explains Yosef’s special hatred of slavery. Because Yosef was himself sold into slavery – “לעבד נמכר יוסף” – Yosef was sold as a slave” (Tehillim 105:17) – he refused to enslave another. He knew what slavery meant

Victims of wrongdoing can react in different ways: Some “take it out on others,” like the child who is bullied in the schoolyard and comes home and bullies his younger brother. Others submissively become victims, and wallow in depression, hurt, and self-pity. But Yosef took a third approach; he became especially sensitive to others. Because he felt the experience of slavery he resolved not to enslave another.

Harav Moshe Feinstein, זצ"ל (1895-1986) was Yosef-like in this respect. He related the following episode that occurred on his first day learning Gemara in cheder (see the biographical introduction to Igrot Moshe Volume 8). The melamed (teacher) pointed to the word “איתמר” in the text of the Gemara and asked the students to pronounce and explain it. Rav Moshe, whose father had taught him the entire Tanach, raised his hand and said that it was “Itamar, the son of Aharon Hakohen.” The older boys in the class, who had already learned Gemara for a while, burst into laughter, for in the Gemara the word is pronounced “itmar” and it introduces an Amoraic statement. The melamed told the children: “You shouldn’t laugh, because Moshe is familiar with the written Torah, and in Tanach there is a person named Itamar, with two kamatzes.”

Rav Moshe later said he learned two things on that first day in cheder. First, that one should be open to new perspectives. The teacher revealed to him that the same letters he was used to in Hebrew actually are used in the language of the Gemara, Aramaic. But the second thing he learned on that day was what it feels like to be insulted and made fun of – and he made sure that for the rest of his life he never made fun of anyone.

SOURCE GUIDE: THE END OF JEALOUSY

Jealousy is a major theme in the book of Bereishit, especially in Yaakov's family; and that theme echoes throughout the rest of Tanach. In his book on the Haftarot, Harav Avraham Rivlin, שליט"א, former mashgiach of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, traces jealousy within the Jewish People from Yaakov's wives to his sons, to Tanach, then to its very end in this week's Haftarah. This source guide is built on that article.

A. Jealousy: Rachel & Leah; Yosef & His Brothers; Shaul & David; Yeravam & Rechavam

Jealousy and envy seem to be built into Yaakov's family. It began between Yaakov's wives. Leah, in the episode of the mandrakes, says to Rachel, "You have almost taken my husband; and now you take my mandrakes?" (Bereishit 30:15). Even the names of her sons reflect how she was vying with Rachel for Yaakov's love (see Bereishit 29:32-34). In the other direction – Rachel was envious of Leah, who had already given birth to six children when Rachel still had none:

<p>1. Bereishit 30:1 Rachel saw that she had not given birth, and she was envious of her sister. She said to Yaakov, "Give me children; if not I will die."</p>	<p>בראשית ל:א וַתֵּרָא רָחֵל כִּי לֹא יָלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב וַתִּקְנָא רָחֵל בְּאָחֵתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל יַעֲקֹב הֲבֵה לִי בָנִים וְאִם אֵין מִתָּה אָנֹכִי.</p>
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Rashi, quoting the Midrash, says that after Rachel's death Yaakov moved his bed into the tent of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant. Reuven, Leah's firstborn son reacted and said, "Even though my mother's sister was a competing wife to my mother, must this also be the case for my mother's sister's maidservant?" He therefore moved Yaakov's bed to his own mother's tent (Rashi on Bereishit 35:22).

The jealousy intensified between Rachel and Leah's offspring. Yaakov gave a special garment to Yosef, Rachel's oldest son (Bereishit 37:3-4), arousing envy in his brothers. Then Yosef shared his dreams, where the brothers' sheaves bowed down to his, and the sun and moon and eleven stars bowed down to him:

<p>2. Bereishit 37:11 His brothers were jealous of him; and his father awaited the matter.</p>	<p>בראשית לו:יא וַיִּקְנְאוּ בוֹ אָחָיו וְאָבִיו שָׁמַר אֶת הַדְּבָר.</p>
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The competition between the descendants of Rachel and those of Leah resurfaces in the relationship between Shaul (descended from Rachel) and his son-in-law David (descended from Leah). David's noticeably greater success in war evoked Shaul's envy:

<p>3. I Shmuel 18:7-9 (7) The joking women sang out, saying, "Shaul has smitten his thousands and David his ten-thousands." (8) Shaul was very angered by this and this matter was disturbing in his eyes. And he said, "They ascribed to David the ten-thousands and to me the thousands. And what is left but the kingdom?" (9) And Shaul eyed David unfavorably from that day onward.</p>	<p>שמואל א' יח:ז-ט (ז) וַתַּעֲנִינָה הַנְּשִׁים הַמְשַׁחֲקוֹת וַתֹּאמְרֵן: "הֲכֵה שָׂאוּל בְּאַלְפָיו וְדָוִד בְּרִבְבֹתָיו." (ח) וַיִּחַר לְשָׂאוּל מְאֹד וַיִּרַע בְּעֵינָיו הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה וַיֹּאמֶר: "נִתְּנָנוּ לְדָוִד רִבְבוֹת וְלִי נִתְּנוּ הָאֲלָפִים וְעוֹד לוֹ אֵךְ הַמְּלֹכָה." (ט) וַיִּהְיֶה שָׂאוּל עוֹיֵן אֶת דָּוִד מֵהַיּוֹם הַהוּא וְהָלָאָה.</p>
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In the next generation, Yeravam son of Nevat (descended from Rachel) ruler of the Northern Kingdom couldn't tolerate the supremacy of Rechavam son of Shlomo, King of Yehudah (descended from Leah). He therefore prevented the people of the Northern Kingdom from making the pilgrimage to Yerushalayim, and set up an idolatrous cult to compete with the Beit Hamikdash. Rabbi Abba is quoted in the Gemara as saying:

<p>4. Sanhedrin 102a The Holy One, blessed be He, grabbed Yeravam by his clothing and said to him, "Repent, and I and you and the son of Yishai will walk in the Garden of Eden." Yeravam asked: "Who will be first?" [Hashem answered:] "The son of Yishai." [Yeravam replied:] "If so I do not want [it]."</p>	<p>סנהדרין קב. תפשו הקדוש ברוך הוא לירבעם בבגדו ואמר לו, "חזור בך, ואני ואתה ובן ישי נטייל בגן עדן." אמר לו, "מי בראש?" "בן ישי בראש." "אי הכי לא בעינא."</p>
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B. Overcoming Jealousy: Rachel & Leah; Reuven, Yehudah, and Yosef; David & Yonatan

Rav Rivlin points out something striking. Counterbalancing the instances of jealousy we mentioned are powerful acts where the same people overcame their jealousy. Instead of competing they acted with love.

I. **Rachel gave her sister “the signs.”** Yaakov and Rachel understood Lavan’s devious side, and assumed he would try to somehow sabotage their marriage through switching Rachel for Leah. So, reasoned the sages of the Talmud, Yaakov gave Rachel certain identifying signs as a type of password to be sure that the woman Lavan brought to the wedding as Rachel was really, indeed, Rachel. However:

<p>5. Rashi on Bereishit 29:25 “In the morning behold she was Leah” – But during the night she was not Leah. For Yaakov gave signs to Rachel. But when Rachel saw that they were bringing in Leah (to marry Yaakov) she said, “Now my sister will be shamed (when Yaakov exposes the ruse).” She got up and gave Leah the signs (Megillah 13b).</p>	<p>רש"י על בראשית כט:כה “ויהי בבקר והנה היא לאה – אבל בלילה לא היתה לאה. לפי שמסר יעקב סימנים לרחל. וכשראתה רחל שמכניסין לו לאה אמרה, “עכשיו תכלם אחותי.” עמדה ומסרה לה אותן סימנים (מגילה יג:).</p>
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II. **Leah prayed that her seventh child would be a girl.** There was a tradition that Yaakov would have twelve sons and they would become the ancestors of the Children of Israel. Leah already had six and was worried that if she gave birth to another boy, Rachel would end up having less children than the maidservants:

<p>6. Rashi on Bereishit 30:21 “Dinah” – Our rabbis explained that Leah made a judgement (“din”) about herself: “If this is a male, Rachel my sister will not be even as one of the maidservants.” She prayed that he be transformed to a female (Berachot 60a).</p>	<p>רש"י על בראשית ל:כא “דינה” – פירשו רבותינו שדנה לאה דין בעצמה: “אם זה זכר לא תהא רחל אחותי כאחת השפחות.” והתפללה עליו ונהפך לנקבה (ברכות ס.).</p>
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III. **Reuven and Yehudah, sons of Leah, saved Yosef, son of Rachel.**

IV. **Instead of taking revenge, Yosef forgives and reconciles with his brothers.**

V. **Yonatan loves David and is happy to be secondary to him.** Instead of sharing his father Shaul’s fear and envy of David, Yonatan (descended from Rachel) loved David (descended from Leah) and affirmed his royalty:

<p>7. I Shmuel 23:17-18 (17) He (Yonatan) said to him (David): “Do not be afraid. For the hand of Shaul my father will not find (harm) you. And you will rule over Israel and I will be secondary to you. And my father Shaul also knows this.” (18) They made a covenant before Hashem</p>	<p>שמואל א' כג:יז-יח (יז) ויאמר אליו: “אל תירא. כי לא תמצאך יד שאול אבי, ואתה תמלוך על ישראל ואנכי אחיה לך למשנה. וגם שאול אבי ידע כן.” (יח) ויכרתו שניהם ברית לפני ה'</p>
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C. Triumph over Jealousy: Our Haftarah and the Messianic Era

One last element, though, is still unresolved. Yeravam son of Nevat and the kings of the Northern Kingdom – the Ten Tribes – never reconciled with the House of David, descended from Yehudah. That is the subject of our Haftarah. The prophet Yechezkel was to take two pieces of wood, one for Yosef and one for Yehudah, then join them to become one. Hashem told him to explain the symbolism to the People of Israel:

<p>8. Yechezkel 37:19-22 (19) Say to them: “Thus said Hashem G-d. Behold I will take the stick of Yosef in the hand of Ephraim and the tribes of Yisrael joined with him. And I will place upon it the stick of Yehudah and make them to one stick and they will be one in My hand.” (20) The sticks that you wrote upon should be in your hand before their eyes. (21) And say to them: “Thus said Hashem G-d. Behold I will take the Children of Israel from among the nations that they went to; and I will gather them from around and I will bring them to their Land. (22) And I will make them into one nation in the Land in the mountains of Yisrael and there will be one king for all of them as a king and they will no longer be two nations and will no longer be divided into two kingdoms.”</p>	<p>יחזקאל לו:יט-כב (יט) ודבר אליהם – פה אמר אדני ה': “הנה אני לקח את עץ יוסף אשר ביד אפרים ושבטי ישראל חבריו. ונתתי אותם עליו את עץ יהודה ועשיתם לעץ אחד והיו אחד בדי.” (כ) והיו העצים אשר תכתב עליהם בידך לעיניהם. (כא) ודבר אליהם – פה אמר ה' אלקים: “הנה אני לקח את בני ישראל מבין הגוים אשר הלכו שם וקבצתי אתם מסביב והבאתי אותם אל אדמתם. (כב) ועשיתי אתם לגוי אחד בארץ בהרי ישראל ומלך אחד יהיה לכלם למלך ולא יהיו עוד לשני גוים ולא יחצו עוד לשתי ממלכות עוד.”</p>
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Unity is Step One, but the final triumph over jealousy is the crucial Second Step – one king from Yehudah:

9. Yechezkel 37:24-25

(24) And my servant David will be king over them and there will be one shepherd for all of them. And they will go according to My laws and they will keep My statutes and do them. (25) And they will live on the Land that I gave to My servant Yaakov, that your forefathers lived in, and they will live on it – they and their children and children's children forever. And David My servant will be the elevated head over them forever.

יחזקאל לו: כד-כה

(כד) ועבדי דוד מלך עליהם ורועה אחד יהיה לכלם ובמשפטי ילכו וחקתי ישמרו ועשו אותם. (כה) וישבו על הארץ אשר נתתי לעבדי ליצקב אשר ישבו בה אבותיכם וישבו עליה המה ובניהם ובני בניהם עד עולם ודוד עבדי נשיא להם לעולם.

TIME FOR KERIAT SHEMA? BY RABBI MESHULAM ISAAC

In one verse of this week's sedrah, the Torah describes one of the most dramatic scenes in history. Yaakov Avinu meets his most beloved, favorite son, Yosef, for whom he had mourned for twenty-two years, unable to be consoled. The pasuk tells how Yosef falls on his father's neck and cries extensively, "ויבך על" צואריו עוד." However, no word of Yaakov's reaction towards Yosef is mentioned. Rashi comments that Yaakov was preoccupied because he was saying Keri'at Shema.

Many commentaries are bothered with the problem of why Yosef did not say Keri'at Shema as well. But I am troubled, instead, by why Yaakov was saying Keri'at Shema at that time. Can you imagine the scene? Yaakov and Yosef, after twenty-two years of suffering from not seeing one another, finally come together, and they both cover their eyes and say Keri'at Shema! Is this an example for us to follow, seemingly callous and inhuman – not to express your emotions, but rather to compulsively perform your mitzvot? I would like to suggest, perhaps, that the exact opposite is true.

Yaakov did not say Keri'at Shema by chance when he met Yosef, ignoring his son; but, rather, he waited with great anticipation for this special minute, and expressed his feelings in Keri'at Shema, and gave this special minute to Hashem, and knocked out the most powerful Keri'at Shema in world history. Perhaps this is a lesson for us to learn about how to worship Hashem. Our feelings and emotions are the fuel or energy we draw from to be 'עובדי ה', servants of G-d. Whenever you're feeling especially happy or sad, it's a golden opportunity to turn to הוא הקדוש ברוך הוא, the Holy One, blessed be He, and express your feelings to Him.

שבת שלום ומבורך

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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