

Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



The Parasha Post of Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parashat Miketz
December 16, 2017

פרשת מקץ
כ"ח בכסלו תשע"ח

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 41:1-44:17
Maftir for Chanukah: *Bemidbar* (Numbers) 7:30-35

In this *parasha*, Yosef interprets Pharaoh's dreams and is appointed to implement Egypt's anti-famine plan. This brings him into contact with his brothers again, as they come to Egypt to buy food.

Towards the end of the book of *Bereshit*, we encounter many tears. Interestingly enough, this crying is done exclusively by men. Beginning in chapter 29, Yaakov cries when he first meets Rachel, and again when he sees Yosef's bloody coat and assumes that Yosef is dead (chapter 37). Yosef cries when he overhears his brothers in Egypt talking about how they were at fault for allowing him to come to harm (chapter 42), when he first sees Binyamin in Egypt (chapter 43), when he reveals himself to his brothers, and again when he embraces Binyamin (chapter 45; Binyamin cries at this point also), when he re-unites with his father (chapter 46), and twice when his father dies (chapter 50). Clearly, the men of the era, at least the major male characters in the Torah, were comfortable with expressing their emotions tearfully. (Others cry as well in the Book of *Bereshit*; Avraham cries, for example, when Sarah dies [chapter 23]. The only woman in the Book of *Bereshit* who cries, however, is Hagar, when she is exiled to the wilderness with Yishmael [chapter 21].)

Rashi appears uncomfortable with these male tears as a visceral response to overwhelming emotion. He attempts to explain away each of the episodes: Yaakov cried when he met Rachel because he saw through prophecy that she would not be buried with him, or perhaps because he had come empty-handed with no gifts to give her as Eliezer had done with Rivka, his mother. It was not really Yaakov who cried upon seeing Yosef's bloody coat, it was Yitzchak, who cried over his son

Yaakov's suffering, but who did not mourn since he knew that Yosef was alive. Yosef cried on seeing Binyamin because he saw the future destruction of the two *Batei Mikdash* (Temples), which would be built in Binyamin's portion.

One can elicit from any written works, including biblical commentaries, information about the socio-historical context in which they were written. The culture of 11th-century Franco-Germany in which Rashi lived and wrote apparently frowned on men crying. Hence, Rashi explains away tears resulting from overpowering emotion.

Even within my lifetime, I have seen the pendulum swing back and forth between men eschewing tears and feeling free to cry as they wish. If we subscribe to the axiom *מעשה אבות סימן לבנים* – *maaseh avot siman l'banim* – “What our ancestors [literally, “fathers”] did should be a guide to their descendants’ [literally “sons”] behavior,” then, based on the end of the Book of *Bereshit*, we should encourage all people, no matter their gender, to cry as they see fit.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Do you cry? Under what circumstances?
- Is all crying legitimate? Are there things one should not cry over? If so, what?
- Why do you think that society has never questioned women's tears, but it has questioned men's tears? Is this right or wrong?