

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital*

Parashat Vayeshev  
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פרשת וישב  
כ"ג בכסלו תשע"ו

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 37:1-40:23

In this *parasha*, Yosef's dreams anger his brothers, and they sell him into slavery in Egypt, where he eventually ends up in prison still interpreting others' dreams.

The circumstances in which the brothers and Yosef were alone, allowing them to sell him into slavery, are outlined in chapter 37, verses 11-17:

יא וַיִּקְנְאוּ-בוֹ, אָחָיו; וְאָבִיו, שָׁמַר אֶת-הַדָּבָר. יב וַיִּלְכוּ, אָחָיו, לְרַעוֹת אֶת-צֹאן אָבִיהֶם, בְּשֶׁכֶם. יג וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יוֹסֵף, הֲלוֹא אָחִיךָ רָעִים בְּשֶׁכֶם--לָכֵה, וְאֶשְׁלַחְךָ אֲלֵיהֶם; וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ, הֲנִנִּי. יד וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ, לֵךְ-נָא רְאֵה אֶת-שְׁלוֹם אָחִיךָ וְאֶת-שְׁלוֹם הַצֹּאן, וְהַשְׁבִּנִי, דָּבָר; וַיִּשְׁלַחְהוּ מֵעֵמֶק חֶבְרוֹן, וַיָּבֹא שֶׁכֶםָה. טו וַיִּמְצְאוּהוּ אִישׁ, וְהִנֵּה תֵעָה בַּשָּׂדֶה; וַיִּשְׁאַלְהוּ הָאִישׁ לְאָמֵר, מַה-תַּבְקֶשׁ. טז וַיֹּאמֶר, אֶת-אָחִי אָנֹכִי מִבְּקֶשׁ; הֲגִידָה-נָא לִי, אֵיפֹה הִם רָעִים. יז וַיֹּאמֶר הָאִישׁ, נָסְעוּ מִזֶּה--כִּי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֹמְרִים, גִּלְכָה דְתִינָה; וַיֵּלֶךְ יוֹסֵף אַחֵר אָחָיו, וַיִּמְצְאוּם בְּדֹתָן.

**11** His [Yosef's] brothers envied him; and his father kept the thing in mind. **12** And his brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. **13** Yisrael said to Yosef: 'Are your brothers not feeding the flock in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them.' And he [Yosef] said to him [Yaakov]: 'Here I am.' **14** And he [Yaakov] said to him [Yosef]: 'Go now, see whether it is well with your brothers, and well with the flock; and bring me back word.' So he sent him out of the valley of Chevron,

and he came to Shechem. **15** And a certain man found him, and, behold, he was wandering in the field. And the man asked him, saying: 'What are you seeking?' **16** And he said: 'I seek my brothers. Tell me, please, where they are feeding the flock.' **17** And the man said: 'They have departed from here; for I heard them say: Let us go to Dotan.' And Yosef went after his brothers, and found them in Dotan.

This Torah section raises a number of fundamental issues. It begins by noting that Yaakov kept in mind the fact that his other sons were jealous of Yosef, and yet, he sent Yosef away to find them. Yosef, being no one's fool, also was aware of his brothers' enmity; yet, he not only seems eager to find them, but goes out of his way to do so! He could have returned home telling his father that they were no longer in Shechem, but opted instead to continue searching for siblings who wished him harm.

Rashi [11<sup>th</sup> Century Franco-Germany] seems to indicate that Yaakov knew that this needed to happen; "he kept the thing in mind" means that he waited to see when the dreams would come to pass. Rashi further maintains that the "man" who met Yosef in Shechem was none other than the angel Gavriel, who facilitated Yosef's meeting up with his brothers by pointing him in the right direction, thus leading to the fulfillment of God's plans for this family and its future.

The Midrash in *Bereshit Rabbah* 84:14 outlines a more down to earth approach: **"Yisrael said to Yosef: 'Are your brothers not feeding the flock in Shechem?'** R. Tanchum said in R. Berechiah's name: Yosef treated [his father] with honor, in accordance with the reverence due to a father from a son. This follows from the end of the verse, 'And he [Yosef] said to him [Yaakov]: "Here I am."— ready to obey. He honored him and obeyed him, though he felt that he was running into danger."

This explains Yosef's response to his father's request. The Midrash goes on to explain the request itself by implying that Yaakov did not give full thought to the ramifications of his request: "R. Chama bar R. Chanina said: Our ancestor Yaakov was ever mindful of these words and his bowels were cut up [meaning, that he was consumed with remorse.] 'I knew that your brothers hate you, and yet you still answered me, "Here I am."'"

Whether this episode was divinely guided, or whether it was a result of human decisions alone, it began the long history of the Israelites' descent into Egypt and their ultimate redemption some 200 years later. It therefore stands as a pivotal moment in the history of the Jewish people.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Do you think Yosef's finding his brothers, which set into motion the events that led to him ending up in Egypt, was divinely or humanly caused? Why do you think this?
- If one of your parents asked you to do something that might prove dangerous to you, what would your response be? Why?
- Should Yosef have argued with Yaakov about his request to find the brothers in Shechem? Why or why not?