

The Torah tells us about Yaakov's relationship to his children.

וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אָהַב אֶת-יוֹסֵף מִכָּל-בָּנָיו כִּי-בְוֶזְקָנִים הוּא לוֹ וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת
פָּסִים:

“And Yisrael loved Yoseph from all of his children, because he was a child of his old age, and he made him a flattering tunic.” (Genesis 37:3).

Thus begins the episode of Yoseph's relationship with his brothers where he gets sold because of their actions. What was the source of the brothers' hatred of Yoseph? We learn that Yaakov loved Yoseph from all his brothers and the love was displayed through the gift of a special tunic. This is how the episode commences. The brothers hate him (ibid 37:4), Yoseph has his dreams (ibid 37:5), about Yosph's supposed ascent to power (ibid 37:6-10), and they are angered and jealous (ibid 37:11).

The reason the brothers hated Yoseph was because his father loved him and because of his dreams. In the previous verse the Torah tells us that “Yoseph brought bad reports to their father.” (ibid 37:2). It does not say that he told bad reports about them or that he spoke ill of them. He merely brought bad reports.

What were these bad reports? Also, was the source of the brothers' hatred of Yoseph simply his special treatment?

The Gemara Bava Basra 123a says, *Rather, doesn't your teacher Rabbi Yonasan say like this: It was appropriate for the child receiving the status of firstborn to emerge from Rachel, as it is written: “These are the generations of Yaakov, Yoseph.” (Genesis 37:2), This is indicating that Yoseph was Yaakov's primary progeny. But Leah advanced ahead of Rachel with appeals for mercy, i.e., with prayer, and thereby earned the status as firstborn for her firstborn. But because of the modesty that Rachel possessed, the Holy One, Blessed be He, returned the status as firstborn to her. This is why Yaakov gave the status as firstborn to Yoseph.*

Accordingly, Yoseph was the rightful heir and rightful king. Therefore, the brothers were wrong in hating him. Further, they hated him more because of his dreams (ibid 37:5). The dreams appeared to be about his lording over them, “The brothers asked him, ‘will you surely be a king over us, will you surely rule over us?’” (ibid 37:8). If Yoseph was the rightful king, these objections were unfounded and misplaced.

The Gemara Sotah 36 says, *it is taught in a baraisa: Yoseph was deserving of having twelve tribes descend from him, the same as twelve tribes descended from his father Yaakov, as it is stated: "These are the generations of Yaakov, Yoseph" (Genesis 37:2). This implies that everything that happened to Yaakov was destined to happen to Yoseph. However, he did not merit this because his semen was emitted from between his fingernails. And even so, the offspring that were meant to descend from him descended from his brother Benjamin, who had ten sons. And they were all named after Yoseph, as it is stated: "And the sons of Benjamin: Bela, and Becher, and Ashbel, Gera, and Naaman, Ehi, and Rosh, Mupim, and Hupim, and Ard" (Genesis 46:21).*¹

Thus, at this point, Yoseph was not only supposed to be the king of the brothers, he was to be the descendant that creates Klall Yisrael.

Our verse says, "*Yisrael loved Yoseph.*" It is the "descendants of Yaakov" (ibid 37:1) but it is Yisrael that loved Yoseph. Our verse does not say, *he loved Yoseph more than his brothers.* It says, "from all of his brothers." The love Yaakov / Yisrael had for Yoseph was because Yaakov saw the potential in Yoseph to create Klall Yisrael, to fulfill the promise that HaShem gave to Avraham, Yitzchok, and him about a great nation and people in their lineage.

What were the bad reports that Yoseph brought to his father?

The Midrash gives three opinions on the evil reports. *What did he say? Rabbi Meir said, 'he said to his father Yaakov "Your sons are suspect regarding the consumption of a limb of a living animal"'. Rabbi Shimon said "They cast their eyes on the daughters of the land". Rabbi Yehuda said "They scorn the sons of the maidservants and call them slaves".* (Bereishis Rabbah 84:7).

However, they did not hate him for these reports, as the verse says they only hated him after he was favored by Yaakov. The Midrash is homiletical. It seems to me that each of these are euphemisms for what the brothers did to Yoseph later on.

After Yoseph tells them of his dreams, their reaction is, "will you surely be king over us, will you surely rule over us?" Yaakov, on the other hand, guarded these prophetic dreams and waited for them to come true. "The brothers were jealous of it (the dreams) and his father watched over the matter." (Genesis 37:11).

¹ The semen emitting from his fingernails is explained in the Gemara as part of his resisting Potiphara, his mistress. The names used by Binyamin for his children all related to Yoseph and the Gemara explains that as well. See there.

If Yoseph brought evil reports to his father then that would be a good excuse for the brothers to hate him. We should hate a sinner and it is easy to hate someone who wrongs you. However, that was not their source of hatred. In fact, it seems like Yoseph never *told* his father bad reports. He *brought them*.

Yoseph had no reason to bring bad reports about the sons of Billah and Zilpah (Gad, Asher, Dan, Naphtali). In fact, they shared land right next to him in the Land of Israel. Ephraim was just north of Binyamin in the center of the Land. Asher and Naphtali made up the northern borders. Dan had land in the north, too, but the majority of its land was to the west, adjacent to Ephraim. Half of Menashe was north of Ephraim and adjacent to Gad (Transjordan) and Asher. In the middle of these were Yissacher and Zevulun. Yoseph, thus, had the largest portion in the Land and was situated perfectly to host the seat of the kingship. In fact, the Mishkan resided in Yoseph's land for more than 400 years. Beis-El (the possible original site of the Beis HaMikdash, see our discussion on Parshas Vayetzeh) is also in Yoseph's territory. Thus, Yoseph had no reason to bring bad reports about any of his brothers.

The bad reports that were brought—through Yoseph—were his dreams. These are bad reports to those who are not the recipient of their fortune. The dreams caused the jealousy. The Torah, as it does, spoke first of the general circumstances and then gave specifics.

So what was the cause of Yaakov's love that caused the brothers to hate him?

The Midrash says, *he was a wise son. He learned in the Yeshiva of Ever like his father. He also looked like Yaakov and took after him.* (Bereishis Rabbah 84:8). Rashi says, based on this Midrash, that this is why Yaakov felt a special connection to Yoseph. The source of his love, then, was that bond of Torah learning and a son following in Yaakov's footsteps.

Ibin Ezra says, he was literally born in Yaakov's old age, after Yaakov was ninety. Binyamin was also born in Yaakov's old age and there were no more children after that.

Ramban says, *in my opinion this is not correct (Ibin Ezra's explanation) for the verse states that Yaakov loved Yoseph more than all his children because he was the son of his old age, whereas all his children were born to him during his old age! Yissachar and Zevulun were not more than a year or two older than Joseph. The correct interpretation appears to me to be that it was the custom of the elders to take one of their younger sons to be with them to attend them. He would constantly lean on his arm, never being separated from him, and he would be called ben z'kunav because he attended him in his old age. Now Yaakov took Yoseph for this purpose, and*

he was with him constantly. He therefore did not accompany the flock when they went to pasture in distant places. And Onkelos who translated, “he was a wise son,” intended to say that in his father’s eyes, Yoseph was a knowledgeable and wise son, and his understanding was as that of elders. However in the case of Benjamin, who is called yeled z’kunim (a little child of his old age), Onkelos translated: *bar savtin*⁴⁰ Rather than *bar chakim*, as in the case of Joseph. (a son of old age). The explanation of Onkelos in the case of Joseph becomes clear because the verse here does not state, “Joseph hayah (was) a son of old age;” instead, it says, *hu lo* (he was unto him), meaning that in his eyes he appeared to be a *ben z’kunim*, and consequently it must mean *bar chakim*, a wise son. For if the sense of the verse is to be understood literally as meaning that “he was a son of his old age,” why specify “to Yakov?” Hence Onkelos correctly translated it as *bar chakim*, which means that Yoseph was a wise son in his father’s estimate. This is the intent of the Chachamim when they said in the Midrash as Rashi quoted. The original source is *Bereishis Rabbah* 84:8. “Whatever Yaakov had learned from Shem and Eber, the traditional masters who taught Torah to Yaakov during the fourteen years he hid from Esau (see *Megillah* 17 a). This source, however, mentions only Eber. See *Bereishis Rabbah* 84:8 for further explanation on why Shem is mentioned.

Thus, there was a special connection and relationship between Yaakov and Yoseph.

In furtherance of Ramban’s question about Binyamin being of old age to Yaakov, too, Chizkuni explains. *For Yoseph had been born to him in his old age. If you were to argue that Binyamin had been born when he was still older, Binyamin caused his father to be reminded of the fact that his very existence brought about his beloved wife Rachel’s death, something which prevented him from loving him as much.*

According to these comments, the brothers should have no reason to hate Yoseph as Yoseph was in a position that had nothing to do with him. He happened to be Rachel’s son, he happened to be born when Yaakov was old, and he served as an attendant and student of Yaakov at Yaakov’s behest. The hatred should have been toward Yaakov in that Yaakov treated Yoseph better than he treated them. Hatred from holy people as the brothers seems to be misguided.

Rabeinu Bechaya says, *ועשה לו כתונת פסים*, “he made for him a special coat.” This was a superior garment. It may have resembled the *עִבְשֵׁת תְּנוּכָה* worn by the High Priest (*Exodus* 28,4). The brothers were envious of Yoseph on account of this garment. This envy aroused by Yaakov making this garment for Yoseph caused our Chachamim (*Shabbos* 10) to go on record that a

father should be careful not to discriminate between his children. This coat was the first of the various causes which produced the tragedy described by the Torah and whose ramifications ultimately resulted in the enslavement of the bodies of the Jewish people in Egypt. It had still later ramifications in the time of the Romans after the destruction of the second Temple when ten of the most illustrious scholars of that time died a martyr's death at the hands of the Romans whose Emperor justified himself quoting the penalty of kidnapping provided in the Torah. He argued that the brothers had never been punished for selling their brother. The body is perceived as the outer garment of the soul. The kind of garment one wears is somehow related to the body underneath it just as the body is related to the soul within it.

Radak also says that Yaakov caused the jealousy through favoritism. Radak and Rabeinu Bechaya make it clear that Yaakov perpetuating the same unequal love that his father Yitzchok showed (Yitzchok loved Esav) was the cause of the hatred. It seems that Yoseph did not do anything to cause his brothers to hate him. They hated him when the wrong-doer was Yaakov.

Ohr Chaim comes to explain the reason for the hatred. Ohr Chaim says, *Yisrael loved Yoseph. The Torah reported this here in order to provide the rationale for the brothers' hatred of their younger, i.e. their "little" brother Joseph. The reason the verse begins with the conjunctive letter ׀ in front of 'Yisrael' is to inform us that if the tale-bearing would have been a problem, the brothers could have coped with that; they would have argued with Yoseph and convinced him that his suspicions were unfounded. It was the additional element of their father displaying distinct favoritism which poisoned the atmosphere between Yoseph and his brothers. Not only did Jacob love Yoseph better than all his other sons combined, but he even made a public display of this. Once this hatred of Yoseph had become a factor in their mutual relations nothing could correct the situation. There was no longer any point in the brothers speaking peacefully, i.e. trying to make peace with the tale-bearer, seeing he was so clearly their father's favorite.*

Thus, it was that the brothers did not see Yoseph as worthy of the position their father was putting him in. They blamed Yoseph for accepting such lofty gifts and esteem when they viewed him as a tale-bearer, dreamer teller, and usurper. Yaakov created this situation in giving Yoseph the love and the gift of the special tunic.

Sforno says, *ועשה לו כחונת פסים, ot mih yb dednetni saw hpesoJ taht ngis elbisiv a sa*, *become the leader of all the brothers both at home and in the field. The use of such distinctive*

clothing to symbolise someone's elevated stature is found also in Isaiah 22:21 ויתשב להו I " , כתגתך, will dress him (Chilkiyah) in your tunic," where it signals that authority is transferred to the one wearing the appropriate garments. The Gemara Baba Kama 11 also confirms that authority is signaled by the attire worn by people possessing it.

Sforno's comment seems to explain the tunic *passim* well. Daas Zekeinim says *passim* means *well-fitted, reaching to the wrists and ankles*. We can say this is like the Kohen Gadol's tunic, a symbol of spiritual prowess and leadership. Ibin Ezra says the tunic was colorful. (This also alludes to the colorful garments worn by the Kohen Gadol).

Chizkuni explains the tunic, *passim* is a name that was to be given to this garment retroactively after Yoseph had been sold. Each letter of the word refers to a different master to whom Yoseph had been sold, commencing with נ for the Midianites and ending with פ for Potiphar. A different explanation sees in the word פסיפ as a "compensation," for being a half orphan, not having a mother anymore. Yaakov tried to compensate him by having a costly garment made for him.

Midrash says a similar mnemonic for פסיפ: *The word פסיפ we may find an allusion to all his misfortunes: he was sold to Potiphar (פוטִיפֶר), to the merchants (סוֹחֲרִים), to the Ishmaelites (יִשְׁמַעֲאֵלִים), and to the Midianites (מִדְיָנִים) (Bereishis Rabbah 84:8).*

I point out here that the brothers are not mentioned in this chain of events. (See Bonus Shtikel for a comment on who actually sold Yoseph).

Malbim says, Yoseph stood out from his brothers. They were dressed like shepherds but Yoseph dressed well because he attended his father.

Rashbam points out that *and Yisrael loved Yoseph* is referring to after the incidents of the dreams. The Torah says he loved Yoseph and explains that reason—the dreams. However, this does not fit well with verses as the Torah already started the episode by saying he was seventeen years old, and the brothers hated him *more* for the dreams.

Was the hatred by the brothers simply *sinas chinam*, baseless and misguided hatred? Yisrael loved Yoseph. Yisrael, the progenitor of the great People of Israel, loved Yoseph. He put his stock in Yoseph and the descendants of Yoseph would be the righteous kings of Israel. The seat of power would sit in Yoseph's territory and the Beis HaMikdash would be built in Beis-El. Yoseph was already acting as a king *at seventeen he was a shepherd of his brother, with their flock*. (Genesis 37:2). He was already looking over and protecting the sons of "his father's

wives.” The sons of Leah did not consider the sons of Bilah and Zilpah as equal shvatim. Otherwise, it would have said, simply, the sons of Bilah and Zilpah, and we already know they were the wives of Yaakov.

The only children who could have a legitimate argument with Yoseph becoming king, or being treated by Yaakov as his successor, would be Reuven, Dan, and Gad. Even Dan and Gad would not have a gripe as they were not from the original wives. Yoseph, in fact, should have been the one that hated Reuven. Rachel should have been the first wife, should have conceived first, and Reuven already showed a characteristic of putting his mother above Rachel.

However, we see that it was Leah’s sons that harbored the hatred of Yoseph. We see no evidence of Yoseph hating or jockeying for position with any of his brothers.

The Midrash gave three parables to how the sons of Leah acted. First, they tore limbs from a live animal and devoured them. After Yoseph tells them his dreams they complain about him being a ruler over them. The dreams could be fulfilled in future generations, as the brothers know the prophecy that first the sons of Israel would have to sojourn in Mitzryaim. (Genesis 15:13). Before Yoseph is able to even digest the dreams, they tear it from him. It was like tearing flesh from something alive. It did not even have time to be fulfilled and they moved to destroy it.

Second, they looked at the daughters of the land. The Midrash does not say they married or sinned with the daughters. It only says they eyed them. They let their eyes wander. Instead of watching themselves and working on their own deeds and success, they let their eyes stray. They went after their desires, money and power. Dinah, their sister, also went out to “look at the daughters of the land.” (Genesis 34:1). No good came out of assimilating or making friends with the locals. The brothers were misguided that they could have power over the current residents. The king of Israel would be after the conquest of the Land.

Third, the brothers treated the sons of Bilah and Zilpah as slaves. They called them “sons of their father’s wives” (who originally were maidservants) but not “brothers.”

In this way, Yisrael—he who prevailed over spiritual and physical powers—loved Yoseph. Yaakov saw in Yoseph his future, his rightful leader, and his heir. He saw someone fit to rule over his brothers and to have his own tribes. He was the one that would create the People of Israel in the Land of Israel. Instead of following their father’s lead on this they sought to not understand it, judge Yoseph unfavorably, and tear him down. The failing was not on Yaakov or Yoseph. It was their own failing in this regard.

Where Yoseph erred was that a leader does not tell. He shows. Yoseph told his brothers his dreams, and displayed his wonderful coat, not because he wanted to make them jealous, but because he wanted to demarcate his position in front of them. He thought he can change their attitude toward the sons of Bilah and Zilpah, and that they would understand he was the rightful heir.

A true leader, one of destiny and prophecy, does not try to force the hand of providence or his rule, but allows the prophecy to be fulfilled and others to anoint him king. There was no reason, really, for him to tell others of his dreams. He could tell his father and then wait for them to come true. He did not have to lord it over his brothers. A king must be strong but must also be humble. Saul was Yoseph's antidote. He came from Binyamin and he was extremely humble. Ultimately, he was too humble and his kingdom did not last. Yoseph had the gifts, the deeds, and the mindset. He was wise and learned and had great inner fortitude (as we see from the later episode with Potiferah). He was only seventeen. He acted "childish" (Genesis 37:2). He was not ready to rule over his brothers. Even though he did not say anything bad about his brothers, he was the cause. He *brought the evil report* before *their* father. He created the wedge by flaunting his dreams by trying to start the process of his rule over them, prematurely.

Incidentally, he had the same error when—later in prison—he tried to get out early by telling the Master Butler to tell Pharaoh about Yoseph and set him free.

As a result of this, the Beis HaMikdash and seat of the kingship were not set in Yoseph's territory. Indeed, Yoseph's own children made the same mistake that Yoseph did. They split from Yehuda and made their own kingdom, that of the Kingdom of Israel. His children became the kings of ten tribes. However, such a kingdom was not meant to last when they set up foreign houses of worship in Beis-El and corrupted the entire purpose of their kingdom.

BONUS SHTIKEL

Who sold Yoseph? Traditionally, and generally, it is thought that the brothers sold Yoseph. However, that is not what the pesukim say.

First, they want to kill Yoseph and throw him in a pit and blame it on a wild beast. (Genesis 37:20). Then Reuven (who should be Yoseph's greatest adversary) says that they should not kill Yoseph, but throw him in a pit unharmed. (ibid 37:22). This way he could come back later and save Yoseph. (ibid). Yehuda then said, "What gain do we have from killing our brother our covering up his blood. Let us sell him to Yishmaelim that are passing by." (Ibid 37:26-27). It was their plan to sell Yoseph but that is not what happened.

"And Midyanites passed, pulled Yoseph up out of the pit, and they sold him to the Yishmaelim." (Ibid 37:28). It was Midyanites that happened along, found Yoseph, pulled him up, and sold him. In fact, this came as a shock to the brothers. Reueven came along saw that Yoseph was not in the pit and rent his clothes. (Ibid 37:29). Where was Reuven? He was likely with his brothers eating. The simple explanation of the verse is that he was with the rest of the brothers. He came to the pit to bring up Yoseph to sell him to the Yishmaelim but the Midyanites beat him to it. Yoseph was gone.

Why did Reuven rent his clothing? It was because he knew that the brothers no longer wanted to kill Yoseph and their plan was to sell him. Finding the pit empty can only mean Yoseph died in the pit or he was kidnapped. He returns to his brothers and says, "the lad is gone, what am I to do?" (Ibid 37:30). He knew it was his plan to throw Yoseph alive into the pit and save him. He did not know what to do now. The brothers did not tell him he was sold *because they did not know what happened to him*. Instead, having seen Yoseph disappear they went back to their original plan and dipped the tunic in blood. (Ibid 37:31).

Note, after Yehuda thought of selling him he said "no use in covering up his blood." There was no indication that they would use the ploy of dipping the tunic in blood if they sold him. It was only now after Yoseph went missing that they reverted to their original plan and dipped the tunic in blood.

The verses corroborate this when it says, "The Midyanites meanwhile sold him to Mitzrayim." (Ibid 37:36). They are the ones that sold him to Mitzrayim because they sold him to a caravan carrying spices—not salves—heading to Egypt. Thus, the brothers are blameless for not telling Yaakov because they really did not know where he went.