

## וישב

---

### YOSEF AND HIS BROTHERS

A perfidious act was committed against Yosef Hatzadik by his brothers. At the age of seventeen, Yosef was commissioned by his father to check on his brothers' welfare in the shepherding fields. This act of thoughtfulness was repaid with the commission of one of the most nefarious plans of fratricide. At first, the brothers contemplated his murder, but then settled on the idea of selling him into slavery. Kayin's unprovoked murder of his brother, Hevel (*Bereishis* 4:8), was condemned by the Torah for all eternity. Similarly, the sale of Yosef into slavery is ignominiously portrayed by the Torah as a shameful act, documented for all generations to come.

The brothers felt justified in removing Yosef from their midst in order to maintain the holy sanctity of the family which was instilled by the *Avos*. Yosef's conduct displayed a violation of the family tradition of personal perfection. He demonstrated vanity in meticulously grooming his hair and his eyes (Rashi, *Bereishis* 37:2). He brought back negative reports about his brothers to their father. He accused them of eating "*Eiver min hachai*" — "limbs from living animals", of treating the "*B'nei Hashifchos*" "the sons of the Handmaids" (i.e. the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah) with disrespect, and he held them under suspicion of illicit relations (*Yerushalmi Peah* 4•). As the Torah states, the brothers "hated him" (*Bereishis* 37:4).

Another reason for the brothers' hatred of Yosef was that, of all the brothers, Yaakov selected Yosef for special treatment. He bestowed special favors on Yosef to demonstrate the special relationship they shared, presenting Yosef with a specially designed multicolored coat (*Bereishis* 37:3). The brothers resented Yosef's favored status. Yaakov had violated a precept taught by *Chazal* that a father should not show special favoritism to one child to the exclusion of the other children (*Shabbos* 10:). The *Gemara* explains that this error in judgment resulted in the brothers' hatred of Yosef, which in turn brought about *Shibud Mitzraim* — the captivity of Egypt. *Tosafos* (ibid.) notes that although the *Shibud* was already revealed to Avraham at the *Bris Bein Habesarim* (*Bereishis* 15:3), this particular act of hatred precipitated it into action. The Abarbanel (*Bereishis* 15:12) actually portrays this singular display of affection on the part of Yaakov as a sin. (See also Rambam, *Hilchos Nechalos* 6:13).

Yosef felt that he was Divinely invested with rulership. There were a number of reasons for this attitude, particularly those famous dreams which portrayed him as the head of the family. His revelations of these dreams (*Bereishis* 37:7,9) to his brothers only served to intensify their hatred for him. The Abarbanel (*Bereishis* 15:12) thus puts some blame on Yosef for this entire episode, due to Yosef's undiplomatic behavior in lording it over his brothers.

The upshot of this disharmony was that the brothers sold Yosef into slavery. They rationalized their decision. After all, their great-grandfather, Avraham, had to divest himself of one of his two sons, Yishmael. Hashem informed Avraham that his future was vested in only one

of his sons, Yitzchak (*Bereishis* 21:12). For Yitzchak reflected the highest qualities of Avraham, while Yishmael represented a less than exalted lifestyle (*ibid.* 9). Similarly, their grandfather, Yitzchak, had to divest himself of one of his sons, Eisav (*ibid.* 27:33), for similar reasons. They reasoned that their father, Yaakov, the third in the trilogy of the *Avos*, would likewise have to divest himself of the one son who clearly represented baser qualities. They all recognized this son to be Yosef (Malbim, *Bereishis* 37:4).

The obvious question is, did Yosef ever forgive his brothers for their infidelity? Superficially, Yosef appeased their consternation when he revealed himself to them by stating:

ועתה לא-אתם שלחתם אתי הנה, כי האלקים

So now it was not you who sent me here, but Hashem  
(*Bereishis* 45:8).

But a closer look at the monologue reveals that Yosef twice reiterated their act of selling him into slavery.

אני יוסף אחיכם אשר מכרתם אתי מצרימה

I am Yosef your brother, whom you sold into Egypt  
(*ibid.* 4).

ועתה אל תעצבו ואל יחר בעיניכם כי מכרתם אתי הנה

Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with  
yourselves, that you sold me here (*ibid.* 5).

The dialogue would have flowed very smoothly without any mention of that act at all. It seems that Yosef was insistent on making a point. He found it necessary to remind his brothers of what they did to him. Years later, the Torah suggests that after all was said and done, the brothers felt uneasy about their relationship with Yosef after their father's demise.

...ויאמרו לו ישטמנו יוסף והשב ישיב לנו את כל הרעה אשר גמלנו אתו

They said: Yosef will peradventure hate us, and will  
certainly requite us all the evil which we did to him  
(*Bereishis* 50:15).

The *Or Hachaim* (*ibid.* 19) very succinctly states that Yosef did not forgive his brothers. He accommodated them; he understood his role and responsibilities toward them; he was more than civil toward them. But he did not forgive them. The *Akeidah* (*ibid.* 45:5) also clearly states that Yosef did not absolve his brothers of their guilt for selling him. Yosef was gracious, but unforgiving (see Rabbeinu Bechaya 50:17; see also Chida, *Bris Olam*).

This tension between Yosef and his brothers was one of the reasons for the historical state of friction between the descendants of Yosef and the descendants of Yehudah. They were both constantly vying for the leadership of *Klal Yisrael*. Yeravam ben Nevat, a son of *Sheivet* Efraim, rightfully challenged the legitimacy of the Davidic dynasty. This challenge had the blessing of the *Navi* of Hashem, Achiyah *Hashiloni* (*Melachim* I 11:31-35). Yechezkel *Hanavi* also mentioned the feud between the two dynasties (*Yechezkel* 37:16), which will not be resolved until the advent of *Mashiach*. In *Acharis Hayamim* — the End of Days — *Mashiach* ben Yosef, a descendant of Efraim, will precede *Mashiach* ben David (*Sukkah* 52\*). Only then will Hashem carry out

Yechezkel's prophesy: "And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all; and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms anymore at all" (*Yechezkel 37:22*).

aA