



Parshas Vayieshev 2021, never be enough

This week's Parsha Perspective is in loving memory of Edward Ben Efraim, Shlomo Ben Edward, and Yirachmiel Daniel Ben Gedalia.

Our Parshas begins with Ya'akov Avinu settling down in the city of Chevron with his four wives and twelve children. The Pasuk writes that Ya'akov loved Yosef, the firstborn of his favorite wife, Rochel, more than the rest. He even made him a unique colored coat to signify his fondness and love.

At night, Yosef would dream of his brothers bowing down to him, and he told them about his dreams and their part in them. Yosef's persistent nagging and preferable treatment infuriated his brothers and caused them to hate him with a vengeance.

Once his brothers were away tending to their sheep, Ya'akov asked Yosef to see how his brothers were doing. When the brothers saw Yosef approaching, they were enraged by his presence and decided to kill him. Reuven implored them not to kill him and instead throw him into a pit nearby. He said this because his plan was to return there later and save him.

When Yosef arrived, his brothers immediately took off his unique coat and threw him into a pit. Yeudah then sold him to an Arab caravan heading to Egypt, who sold him to Potiphar, Pharaoh's chief butcher. Meanwhile, the brothers dipped Yosef's coat into animal blood, brought it to Ya'akov, and told him that a wild beast had eaten Yosef.

Ya'akov ripped his clothing and began to mourn for his beloved son. However, when his sons or daughters tried to comfort him, he ignored them and refused to be comforted. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef was highly successful in all that he did

because G-d was with him. Seeing his success, Potiphar, Pharaoh's chief butcher, put Yosef in charge of his household and businesses.

However, a question comes to mind: When the Torah writes that Potiphar put Yosef in charge of his household, it adds one exception. The Pasuk says (39:6), *"He left all that he had in Yosef's hands except the food that he ate."* Why does the Pasuk, which is usually very clear and concise, add "except the food that he ate"? What is the Pasuk trying to imply and hint?

Rashi (*Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki, the leading commentary on the Torah*) answers this question by explaining how people spoke back then. He quotes the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah 86:6*) that when Potiphar put Yosef in charge of everything but *"the food that he ate,"* he referred to his wife, for she was the one who understood his taste and cooked food.

Rashi explains that the Pasuk implies that Potiphar had complete and total confidence in Yosef to run his household. Therefore, Potiphar placed him in control of everything except for his marriage. Ironically, when his wife falsely accused Yosef, Potiphar believed the lie rather than his most trustworthy and honest servant.

However, the Ibn Ezra (*the famous Spanish Rabbi, Rav Avraham Ben Meir Ibn Ezra*) gives a deeper and more profound explanation. He writes that Yosef was in charge of everything except Potiphar's food because he did not believe in the Egyptian G-ds.

Therefore, Yosef was prohibited from touching or dealing with Potiphar's food. As the Torah details at the end of next week's Parsha (43:32), *"The Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians."*

The Ibn Ezra explains that even when Yosef became second to the king and only answered to Pharaoh himself, the Egyptians still did not eat with him. Regardless of how much Yosef seemed to be like an Egyptian, he was still not one of them. He would never be Egyptian enough to be part of their people.

This lesson is ever more prevalent as we approach Chanukah, the holiday of light. Just like the Maccabees stood up and went against those who tried to assimilate into Greek culture. We must fight assimilation by educating ourselves on our mission in

this world, to be a beacon of light to the rest of the nations. But we must also realize we will never be enough to become one of them.

In our daily life, it is imperative to remember that we are all created for a unique mission in this world. Our purposes are not the same, nor are the journeys to accomplishing them.

The result of trying to be like everyone but yourself is not fulfilling your true potential. However, looking at others for inspiration can motivate and help us find our unique identity.

"It is better to be hated for what you are than to be loved for what you are not."

*Have an inspirational Shabbos,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*