

טעמו וראו

A taste of the
Rebbe's teachings

Vayechi



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Sibling Rivalry

Joseph brings his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to be blessed by Jacob before his demise. Jacob surprises them by putting his right hand on Ephraim, the younger son, and his left hand on Manasseh, the older one. Joseph jumps in to correct the mistake. But what exactly bothered him? What was so wrong about Jacob's choice?

A lesson about education, sibling rivalry, and honoring parents.

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Part 1 - Why Must You Insist?

Source 1

Genesis 48:1-2, 8-10, 13, 14-19



A short time after this, Joseph was told that his father was sick. Joseph went to his father, taking his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, along with him. When Jacob was told that Joseph was coming to him, he summoned his strength and sat up in bed.

Jacob saw Joseph's sons. "Who are these?" he asked. "They are the sons that G-d gave me here," replied Joseph to his father. "If you would, bring them to me," said Jacob. "I will give them a blessing." Jacob's eyes were heavy with age, and he could not see. When Joseph brought his sons near him, he kissed him and hugged them.

Joseph then took the two boys. He placed Ephraim to his right, to Jacob's left, and Manasseh to his left, to Jacob's right. He then came close to his father.

Rashi on the verse:

Ephraim to his right, to Jacob's left: When one approaches another person, his right hand is opposite the other's left. Since Manasseh was the firstborn he should be placed on the right for the blessing.

חומש בראשית, פרק מ"ח

א. ויהי אחרי הדברים האלה
ויאמר ליוסף הנה אביך חלה
ויקח את-שני בניו עמו את-
מנשה ואת-אפרים: ב. ויגד
ליעקב ויאמר הנה בנך יוסף בא
אלך ויתחזק ישראל וישב על-
המטה:

ח. וירא ישראל את-בני יוסף
ויאמר מי-אלה: ט. ויאמר יוסף
אל-אביו בני הם אשר-נתת לי
אלהים בזה ויאמר קחם-נא אלי
ואברכם: י. ועני ישראל כבודו
מזקן לא יוכל לראות ויגש אתם
אליו וישק להם ויחבק להם:

יג. ויקח יוסף את-שניהם את-
אפרים בימינו משמאל ישראל
ואת-מנשה בשמאלו מימין
ישראל ויגש אליו:

רש"י על הפסוק:

את אפרים בימינו משמאל
ישראל. הבא לקראת חברו,
ימינו פנגד שמאל חברו, וכיון
שהוא הבכור, מימין לברכה:

Jacob reached out with his right hand and placed it on Ephraim's head even though he was the younger son. He placed his left hand on Manasseh's head. He deliberately crossed his hands, even though Manasseh was the firstborn. He gave Joseph a blessing.

He said, "The G-d before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, walked, is the G-d who has been my shepherd from as far back as I can remember until this day, sending an angel to deliver me from all evil. May He bless the lads, and let them carry my name, along with the names of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac. May they increase in the land like fish."

When Joseph saw that his father had placed his right hand on Ephraim's head, he was displeased. He tried to lift his father's hand from Ephraim's head and place it on Manasseh's. "That's not the way it should be done, father," said Joseph. "The other one is the firstborn. Place your right hand on his head."

His father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. The older one will also become a nation. He too will attain greatness. But his younger brother will become even greater, and his descendants will become full-fledged nations."

י. וַיִּשְׁלַח יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־יָמִינוֹ
וַיֵּשֶׁת עַל־רֹאשׁ אֶפְרַיִם וְהוּא
הַצָּעִיר וְאֶת־שְׂמָאלוֹ עַל־רֹאשׁ
מְנַשֶּׁה שְׂכַל אֶת־יָדָיו כִּי מְנַשֶּׁה
הַבְּכוֹר: טו. וַיִּבְרַךְ אֶת־יוֹסֵף
וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלְכוּ
אֲבֹתִי לִפְנֵי אֲבֹתֶיךָ וַיִּצְחָק
הָאֱלֹהִים הָרַעָה אֹתִי מֵעוּדֵי עַד־
הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: טז. הַמִּלְאָךְ הַגָּאֹל
אֹתִי מִכָּל־רָע יִבְרַךְ אֶת־הַנְּעָרִים
וַיִּקְרָא בָהֶם שְׁמִי וְשֵׁם אֲבֹתִי
אֲבֹתֶיךָ וַיִּצְחָק וַיְדַגּוּ לְרֹב בְּקָרֶב
הָאָרֶץ: יז. וַיֹּרָא יוֹסֵף כִּי־יֵשֶׁת
אָבִיו יָד־יָמִינוֹ עַל־רֹאשׁ אֶפְרַיִם
וַיֵּרַע בְּעֵינָיו וַיִּתְמַךְ יָד־אָבִיו
לְהַסִּיר אֹתָהּ מֵעַל רֹאשׁ־אֶפְרַיִם
עַל־רֹאשׁ מְנַשֶּׁה: יח. וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף
אֶל־אָבִיו לֹא־כֵן אָבִי כִי־זֶה הַבְּכוֹר
שִׁים יְמִינִךְ עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ: יט. וַיִּמָּאֵן
אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר יָדְעֹתִי בְנִי יָדְעֹתִי
גַם־הוּא יִהְיֶה־לָּעַם וְגַם־הוּא
יִגְדֹל וְאוֹלָם אַחֲרָיו הַקָּטָן יִגְדֹל
מִמֶּנּוּ וְזָרְעוֹ יִהְיֶה מְלֹא־הַגּוֹיִם:

The Sicha, Part 1

Why Does Joseph Insist?



Joseph acted three times to ensure his father treated Manasseh as the first born.

The first time is understandable. Wanting to position Manasseh before Ephraim, he placed Ephraim to his right and Manasseh to his left, to the right of his father. He did so because "the firstborn should be placed on the right for the blessing"

However, after noticing that Jacob deliberately switched his hands during the blessing, placing his right on Ephraim and left on Manasseh, the question arises: Why did he attempt to switch his father's hands, saying, "The other one is the firstborn, place your right hand on his head"? Why would he, as a father, attempt to withhold a blessing from his son? If he were seeking Manasseh's welfare, he should have requested a second blessing for him, instead of attempting to retract the blessing that was already granted to Ephraim!

Part 2 - Avoiding Conflict

Source 2

Genesis 37:3-11



Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, since he was the child of his old age. He made Joseph a long colorful coat. When his brothers realized that their father loved him more than all the rest, they began to hate him. They could not say a peaceful word to him. Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more.

“Listen to the dream I had,” he said to them. “We were binding sheaves in the field, when my sheaf suddenly stood up erect. Your sheaves formed a circle around my sheaf and bowed down to it.”

“Do you want to be our king?” retorted the brothers. “Do you intend to rule over us?” Because of his dreams and words, they hated him even more.

He had another dream and told it to his brothers. “I just had another dream,” he said. “The sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”

When he told it to his father and brothers, his father scolded him and said, “What kind of dream did you have? Do you want me, your mother, and your brothers to come and prostrate ourselves on the ground to you?” His brothers became very jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

חומש בראשית, פרק ל"ז

ג. וישראל אהב את־יוסף מִכָּל־
בָּנָיו כִּי־בן־זָקֵנִים הוּא לוֹ וַעֲשֶׂה
לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים: ד. וַיַּרְאוּ אָחָיו
כִּי־אֹתוֹ אֱהָב אָבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אָחָיו
וַיִּשְׁנָאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַבְּרוֹ
לְשָׁלָם: ה. וַיַּחְלֶם יוֹסֵף חֲלוֹם וַיֵּגֶד
לְאָחָיו וַיֹּסֶפּוּ עוֹד שְׂנֹא אֹתוֹ: ו.
וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שְׁמַעוּ־נָא הַחֲלוֹם
הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חֲלַמְתִּי: ז. וְהִנֵּה
אֲנִי־חֲנוּ מֵאֲלֵמִים אֲלֵמִים בְּתוֹךְ
הַשָּׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה קָמָה אֲלֵמְתִי וְגַם־
נִצָּבָה וְהִנֵּה תִסָּבִינָה אֲלֵמְתֵיכֶם
וְתִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְאֲלֵמְתִי: ח. וַיֹּאמְרוּ
לוֹ אָחָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ
אִם־מָשׁוּל תִּמְשָׁל בָּנוּ וַיֹּסֶפּוּ
עוֹד שְׂנֹא אֹתוֹ עַל־חֲלֹמְתוֹ וְעַל־
דְּבָרָיו: ט. וַיַּחְלֶם עוֹד חֲלוֹם אֲחֵר
וַיְסַפֵּר אֹתוֹ לְאָחָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה
חֲלֹמְתִי חֲלוֹם עוֹד וְהִנֵּה הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְאַחַד עָשָׂר כּוֹכָבִים
מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לִי: י. וַיְסַפֵּר אֶל־
אָבִיו וְאֶל־אָחָיו וַיַּגְעֲרֻבוּ אָבִיו
וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מָה הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר
חֲלַמְתָּ הַבּוֹא נִבּוֹא אֲנִי וְאַמְךָ
וְאֶחָיִךְ לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְךָ אֶרְצָה: יא.
וַיִּקְנְאוּ־בוּ אָחָיו וְאָבִיו שָׁמַר אֶת־
הַדָּבָר:

Source 3

Genesis 37:18-20, 26-28



They saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they were plotting to kill him. “Here comes the dreamer!” they said to one another. “Now we can have the chance! Let’s kill him and throw him into one of the wells. We can say that a wild beast ate him. Then let’s see what will become of his dreams!”

Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover his blood? Let’s sell him to the Arabs and not harm him with our own hands. After all, he’s our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed. Midianite Arab traders passed by, and the brothers pulled Joseph out of the well. They sold him to the Arabs for 20 pieces of silver, and they brought Joseph to Egypt.

חומש בראשית, פרק ל"ז

יח. וַיֵּרְאוּ אוֹתוֹ מֵרֶחֶק וּבְטָרֶם יִקְרַב אֲלֵיהֶם וַיִּתְנַכְּלוּ אוֹתוֹ לְהַמִּיתוֹ: יט. וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל-אָחִיו הֲנֵה בָעַל הַחֲלֹמוֹת הֲלֹזָה בָּא: כ. וַעֲתָה לְכוּ וְנַהַרְגֵהוּ וְנִשְׁלֹכֵהוּ בְּאֶחָד הַבְּרוֹת וְאָמְרֵנוּ חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתוֹ וְנִרְאָה מִה-יָהִיו חֲלֹמָתוֹ:

כו. וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה אֶל-אָחִיו מִה-בִּצָּע כִּי נַהַרֵּג אֶת-אָחִינוּ וְכִסִּינוּ אֶת-דָּמּוֹ: כז. לְכוּ וְנִמְכְּרֵנוּ לַיִּשְׁמָעֵאלִים וְיִדְּנוּ אֶל-תַּה-יִּבּוּ כִּי-אָחִינוּ בְּשָׂרֵנוּ הוּא וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אָחָיו: כח. וַיַּעֲבְרוּ אַנְשִׁים מִדִּינִים סַחְרִים וַיִּמְשְׁכוּ וַיַּעֲלוּ אֶת-יֹסֵף מִן-הַבּוֹר וַיִּמְכְּרוּ אֶת-יֹסֵף לַיִּשְׁמָעֵאלִים בְּעֶשְׂרִים כֶּסֶף וַיְבִיאוּ אֶת-יֹסֵף מִצְרָיִמָּה:

The Sicha, Part 2

Joseph's Personal Memories



The explanation is as follows:

Joseph knew what could happen when a younger child is given preferential treatment—he personally experienced the result of his father’s special attention to him and his gift of the coat of many colors; it resulted in his brother’s jealousy, to the extent that they sold him into slavery in Egypt!

Therefore, when Joseph saw Jacob giving preferential treatment to Ephraim over Manasseh, he did everything in his power to stop it, to ensure that his own sons do not experience the same unfortunate fate. In the words of our Sages, “A person should never differentiate between his sons; due to two extra measures of fine wool that Jacob gave to Joseph over his brothers, his brothers were jealous of him, and ultimately our forefathers went down to Egypt.”

Source 4

Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 10b



Rava bar Mechaseya said in the name of Rav Chama bar Gurya, who said in the name of Rav: Due to two extra measures of fine wool that Jacob gave to Joseph over his brothers, his brothers were jealous of him, and ultimately our forefathers went down to Egypt.

תלמוד, מסכת שבת, דף י' עמוד ב'

וְאָמַר רַבָּא בַּר מַחְסֵיָא אָמַר רַב
חָמָא בַּר גּוּרְיָא אָמַר רַב: לְעוֹלָם
אֵל יִשְׁנָה אָדָם בְּנוֹ בֵּין הַבָּנִים
- שֶׁלֹּא יִפְלֶה אוֹתוֹ לְטוֹבָה.
שְׁבַע־שְׁבִיל מִשְׁקָל שְׁנֵי סָלְעִים
מִלֵּת שְׁנֵתוֹ יַעֲקֹב לְיוֹסֵף -
כְּשֶׁעָשָׂה לוֹ כְּתוּנַת פָּסִים. יוֹתֵר
מִשְׁאָר בָּנָיו, נִתְקַנְאוּ בּוֹ אֶחָיו
וְנִתְגַּלְגַּל הַדָּבָר וַיֵּרְדּוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ
לְמִצְרַיִם.

Part 3 – Why Didn't Jacob Learn a Lesson?

Source 5

Midrash Pesikta Rabbati chapter 3



When Jacob fell ill, they informed Joseph:

What about all the praise of Joseph for honoring his father? Did he not visit often? Did he need to be informed by others that his father was sick? Rather, this is to inform you of his righteousness. He did not want to be alone with his father, lest he say to him, “What did your brothers do to you?” And then curse them...

Joseph said, “I know that my father is righteous, and all his declarations come true. He told Laban that whoever stole his idols would die, and my mother perished. Will I be the cause of a curse on my brothers? If he curses them, the destruction of the entire world will be on my head,” [for the entire world was created for the sake of the twelve tribes]. Therefore, he didn't visit his father frequently.

מדרש פסיקתא רבתי פרק ג'

כיון שהרגישו ביעקב שחולה, באו והודיעו ליוסף. והרי כל שבחו של יוסף שהיה מפליג על כבוד אביו, ולא נכנס אצלו בכל שעה? שאילולי שבאו אחרים ואמרו לו אביו חולה לא היה יודע?

אלא להודיעך צדקו, שלא רצה להתייחד עם אביו, שלא יאמר לו היאך עשו בך אחיך ומקללם.. אמר יוסף: אני יודע צדקו של אבא כל דבריו גזירות הן. אמר ללבן: עם אשר תמצא את אלקיך לא יחיה ומתה אמי, ואני בא לומר שיקללם? יקללם ונמצאתי מחריב את כל העולם! שלא נברא העולם אלא בשביל השבטים. לפיכך לא היה הולך אצל אביו בכל שעה:

Source 6

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot De'ot 7:2



There is a much more serious sin than gossip. It is called lashon horah, referring to someone who repeats negative information about a colleague, even if true.

When someone spreads fabrications, it is called “defamation of character.” But lashon horah is someone who sits and relates: “This is what so and so has done;” “His parents were such and such;” “This is what I have heard about him,” telling uncomplimentary things. Concerning this transgression, the verse states: “May G-d cut off all guileful lips, the tongues which speak proud things...”

משנה תורה, הלכות דעות, פרק ז, הלכה ב'

יש עון גדול מזה עד מאד והוא בקלל לאו זה והוא לשון הרע. והוא המספר בגנות חבירו אף על פי שאומר אמת.

אבל האומר שקר וקרא מוציא שם רע על חבירו. אבל בעל לשון הרע זה שיושב ואומר כן וכך עשה פלוני וכך וכך היו אבותיו וכך וכך שמעתי עליו ואמר דברים של גנאי. על זה אמר הכתוב “יכרת ה' כל שפתי חלקות לשון מדברת גדלות:

Jacob Never Knew



Jacob never found out that his sons sold Joseph into slavery out of jealousy. They certainly did not share this information with him, and Joseph too, certainly didn't speak evil of his brothers [for we are forbidden to speak evil about other people, whether or not the information is true]. Therefore, Jacob saw no harm in granting Ephraim preferential treatment (seeing that he showed greater promise); to the contrary, that was how he treated his own children; he gave special status to Joseph instead of Reuven, the first born, and as a result, Joseph became the second-to-the-king, a ruler throughout the land of Egypt. It was the fulfillment of Joseph's dream of the eleven stars bowing to him. Even the descent of the people of Israel into Egypt—Jacob saw it as the fulfillment of the destiny which G-d told to Avraham at the covenant. And notable, through Joseph's descent into Egypt, the descent of all the Israelites took place (not by force but) in an honorable fashion.

When Joseph saw favoritism being extended to his younger son, he couldn't share his true feelings about it with his father, because he did not want to speak evil about his brothers. Therefore, he excused his actions by saying, "This is the first-born, place your right hand on his head."

Shabbat Hagadol 5745-1985.
Toras Menachem-Hisvaaduyos 5745 vol. 3 pg. 1642.

Source 7

Midrash, Bireishit Rabbah 86:2

בראשית רבה, פרק פ"ו ב'

Rabbi Berechya said in the name of Rabbi Judah ben Simon: When a cow is being dragged to the slaughter and she refuses to budge, what is done? Her son is drawn in front of her, and she follows him instinctively, even though it is against her will.

So too: Jacob's destiny was to go down to Egypt, even, if need be, in chains. But G-d said, "Will I humiliate my 'first-born son' so? Should I place it in Pharaoh's heart to publicly draw him to Egypt? Rather, I will bring his son ahead of him, and he will follow impulsively, even if it against his will." Ultimately, he went down to Egypt, bringing the Shechinah with him.

רבי ברכיה בשם רבי יהודה בר
סימון אמר, לפרה שהיו מושכין
אותה למקולין ולא היתה
נמשכת, מה עשו לה, משכו
את בנה לפניו והיתה מהלכת
אחריו על כרחיה שלא בטובתה.
כך היה יעקב אבינו ראוי לירד
למצרים בשלשלאות ובקולריו,
אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא בני
בכורי ואני מורידו בבזיון, ואם
לתן בלבבו של פרעה אני מורידו
פומבי, אלא הריני מושך את
בנו לפניו, והוא יורד אחריו על
כרחו שלא בטובתו, והוריד את
השכינה למצרים עמו.

מזמור של "משרד השלוחים"

נוסד בימי השבעה לזכרון ולע"נ הרב גבריאל נח זאוגנו ורבה הי"ד
שלוחי הרבי במומבאי, הודו

