

This Land is My Land

A Breslov Perspective on the Holy Land

Essay # 40—Parshat Vayeishev (2) 5762

"And Yaakov dwelled in the Land where his fathers had dwelt, in the Land of Kanaan. These are the chronicles of Yaakov, Yosef was 17 years old..." Scripture, with Rashi's commentary, details the relationship between Yaakov and Yosef, noting that Yosef was more like Yaakov than any of his brothers were. In other words, Yaakov found Yosef to be more capable of receiving and transmitting his teachings than the other future tribal leaders. Yosef was thus set to become the designated leader.

Yosef's brothers were extremely righteous, learned and great tzaddikim in their own right. Nonetheless, they were not Yosef. Yaakov "favored" him, giving Yosef the cloak of many colors, which alluded to the many faces of Yosef. We find that he was able to relate to the tribes born from Bilhah and Zilpah better than his brothers. He was able to face up to his brothers and relate his prophetic dreams without fear. He withstood the pressures of Potifar's house and the enticement of Potifar's wife. When he was unjustly imprisoned he rose to the position of "head warden" and was capable of working with each prisoner according to his level. Later, he was appointed the viceroy of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. He provided for each and every one of his subjects, yet could deal with every idol worshipping Egyptian without being affected by their idolatries and foolishness.

His brothers simply didn't believe him capable of all that. They were older, more mature, more experienced. Simply not possible that Yosef could do all that. Kind of like, "We can't, so he certainly can't." This is the reason for the subsequent descent into Egypt, the reason for the subsequent exiles. Jealousy, hatred and strife. Opposition to the true tzaddik. It's the reason we are still suffering in exile.

We have our Land. We are supposed to be a bright and brilliant nation, a nation which has produced countless capable leaders under the most impossible conditions. In addition, we are supposed to be a light unto the nations. Yet we have trouble getting our act together in regard to a patently false claim, that of the Palestinians, who want a land that never belonged to them! It all stems, from the dispute of Yosef and the brothers. A struggle for power. "Who is in charge?" "Who is going to be the leader?" We allow the pettiness of "turkey feed" to fill our diaries and crowd our appointment schedules, never learning to face, head on, the serious matters of life. Yosef did. He knew there was a call for leadership and informed his brothers of his visions of the future. Notice, however, they didn't offer any leadership ideas of their own; they merely scoffed at him.

Today, the situation is quite similar. There are people of vision, people capable of leading the Jewish nation. Sadly, we've become used to sidestepping the important issues of a true leader and come to rely upon so-called leaders who choose popular issues and present their platforms dependent upon what the people he is supposed to lead, say. We have "followship," not leadership. We squabble like turkeys (see [previous essay](#)), squawking loudly for our voices to be heard, because we concentrate upon the pettiness of the day. We have allowed jealousies to permeate our hearts. We constantly look at our neighbors to examine their successes. Not being able to measure up to all or some of their success, our jealousies lead us to seek their downfall.

Perhaps you're a bit skeptical. Is this really true? Consider—when was the last time a candidate for leadership/fellowship won on his own platform? Wasn't he elected because the other guy was worse?! Nowadays, one often attempts to score points not by putting his best foot forward, but by claiming that the other follow is inept, or perhaps dangerous. And the worse is yet to come.

See how the brothers came to hate (!) Yosef. The tzaddik, the true tzaddik. See what jealousy did—it drove them to hate their own flesh and blood. They conspired to kill and at the last moment "merely" sell Yosef into slavery. See what strife and dispute can lead to in a family. A small family that needs one another for survival since they are a few among many unfriendly neighbors.

This is not some frightening Stephen King novel, but a real life story which the Torah tells us to so that we can learn about human nature and its frailties. Yet we succumbed then and we succumb now. How often do we find ourselves pitted against a neighbor, in shul, in community programs, in political views? How often do we mistakenly take umbrage at an innocent remark and allow a blowup to occur, which rends asunder an entire community?

We face a most serious security situation in Israel today, with murderers and suicide bombers aspiring to attain their goals. With history as our guide, we should remember that we all need each other, set aside our differences and unite. Instead, we squawk and squabble at each other: He's religious! He's irreligious! He's a right-winger! He's left-wing! He's this, he's that. The only ones who profit from this are the media who make a livelihood from these disputes. Everyone else loses. Why?

The Land of Israel is so called, Rebbe Nachman teaches, because it receives its sanctity from the nation of Israel, the Jewish people (*Likutey Moharan* II, 40; see [Essay #24](#)). Therefore, if we are fragmented, then the Land, too, is fragmented. If we allow barriers to be built up between ourselves, then we also allow borders and barriers to rise up within the Land itself.

This is the lesson of this week's Torah reading. We must learn to set aside our differences, our jealousies, our hatreds and our pettiness. We must learn to accept others, to reach out to others, to set aside those barriers we've built between ourselves. We must also learn to seek the true tzaddik, the true leader, the Yosef, who is not afraid to speak the truth, even if it is unpopular. We must remember that jealousy and hatred got Yosef sold into slavery. It was these traits which concealed the tzaddik, relegating him in peoples' eyes to the lowest level of existence.

Yet even in servitude, the tzaddik never loses his cool, his integrity or his devotion to God. He faces the seductions of a Potifar's wife, the temptations of another's business affairs, yet remains scrupulously honest. He may suffer abuse and ridicule from those whom he serves loyally. He may be oppressed and imprisoned. Nonetheless, even while shackled with the yoke of imprisonment, within the restraints that his "socially active patrons" relegate him to, Yosef stands tall and proud of his Jewish heritage, willingly sharing his treasures and goodness with anyone who is willing to receive from him. As we shall see in next week's Torah reading, even when Yosef, the tzaddik, is freed from constraint and elevated to the highest official position, he never lets go of his humility and always seeks the benefit of his subjects, even if the price is steep and seems unpopular. He knows that in the end, **ALL** the people will benefit from his policies.

So we have our job laid out for us, to get rid of pettiness and hatred, jealousies and strife. We've got to become united, have respect our brothers and sisters, neighbors and co-religionists. We've got to break apart our fragmented society and rebuild our love and devotion to one another. It's a tall order. But if we are tearing it apart, how can we claim this Land as ours?

I love you all. Have a good one.

Chaim Kramer

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