

Parshat Miketz Lost and Found Michal Kohane - Class of 2020

When she was 10 years old in the mid-1940s, R. accompanied her mom to a doctor's visit because her little brother M. was not well. Mom was hesitant to make the trip from Tzefat to Tiberias hospital by herself. Having arrived recently from North Africa, she did not want to be separated from her family members.

"The baby needs some care, leave him here," said the nurse, bidding farewell to mom and daughter who left with a heavy heart, schlepping in buses back to their home in the hills. When they came back the next day, they were told that the baby had died and had already been buried. The child was never seen again, which would be normal for dead people, but then, some 17 years later, a draft notice from the army appeared in their mailbox, implying that maybe he did not die at all.

Sadly, Israel is riddled with such tragedies, initially known as the "Yemenite Children" but later realized to have affected other Sefardi-Mizrachi groups as well. In the post-Holocaust era of newly established Israel, some people had no children, and some had "too many" and "won't notice if one is given away to someone who really wants a child." The government has not been forthright with the records and while the archives remain closed, stories continue to unfold privately. The depth and complexity of this saga is well beyond the scope of a dvar Torah. What is of interest to me this week, is the fact that R, now in her 70's, never stops looking for her little brother M. Everywhere she goes, she checks people closely. She sees him in her sons and grandsons. Never has she lost hope that one day, somewhere, she'll see him. And no matter that 60 some years have gone by, she's sure she'll know it's him.

I think about this quite often and especially this week. Again and again I wonder, how come the brothers didn't recognize Joseph?

I recently had the opportunity of meeting up with my high school classmates after decades of disconnect. I was very nervous that I would not remember or be able to recognize half of them, but as they slowly walked in, it was obvious. It didn't take long before the "Oh my God!" followed by something along the lines of 'You haven't changed a bit!' and while, of course, we have all changed, there is also something that is very much the same.

Joseph was not a baby when the brothers sold him to a caravan of merchants, traveling south. He was 17. Not quite fully grown, but definitely a young man with a unique look of his own. The caravan is described as "Yishma'elim" (Genesis 37:28), a term used for just about anyone living in Israel who is not Jewish, but originally, it should have been reserved for the descendants of Yishma'el, who were Joseph's half-second cousins. "Half-second cousins" are not people we might have dinner with daily, but this is not such a big family. Surely, they at least recognized each other! And no one said anything?

Further, upon meeting him, the brothers don't even begin to suspect that he looks slightly familiar! Yes, he had a different hair-do, new clothing, and maybe even make-up. He was out of context, and kept his distance. And yet, if anyone, they knew his whereabouts, and that he was a dreamer, and then suddenly a "dreamer" who is a "foreigner", "Hebrew", o (Joseph describes himself 39:14 & 41:12), shows up on Pharaoh's side, the brothers do not suspect that it is Joseph?

As I saw with R., when people lose a relative, they are usually forever calculating what age might this person be, what could they be doing, where might they be... and here we have ten grown man, later 11, and no one sees anything? Add to that, that Joseph immediately knew them. Of course, they were much more conspicuous; he waited for them; they didn't know he was there. And yet the contrast is striking.

Perhaps the answer can be found in last week's reading: "And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they *hated* him, and could not speak peaceably unto him"; (Genesis 37:4). And immediately in the next verse: "And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brothers, and they *hated* him yet the more" (37:5), and if we haven't yet quite understood how the brothers felt about Joseph, the text says again: "...And they *hated* him yet the more..." (37:8).

One of Joseph's greatest qualities is that he "sees". Just like his father Jacob did when he was younger, Joseph sees dreams. Joseph sees opportunities, solutions and, mostly, God wherever he goes. The brothers, on the other hand, have trouble "seeing". The last time the verb "to see" is mentioned with them, is when they see Joseph coming and they conspire to kill him (37:18). It takes a while before the verb to see shows up again, and it is when Jacob finally sees that "there is food in Egypt" (42:1). That "seeing" is what leads to the family's meeting, resolution and ultimate reunion. Continue and hear Judah's words when he asks their father to take Benjamin with them. Judah implores Jacob, telling him that Joseph said: "You shall not see my face, unless your brother be with you." (43:5). And last, after the emotional meeting and revelation, coming up next week, Joseph says to them: "And, behold, your eyes (now) see..." (45:12).

Could it be that what blinded the brothers was the power of hatred? How much do we miss when we let ourselves be guided by negativity and hatred!

We don't know what Joseph's intentions were when he initially told the brothers his dreams. We "assume" he was a showoff but the ones who read ill-will into his words were his brothers, not him. Perhaps Joseph wanted to share his joy at the fact that he sees them all together in the future! After all, up until now, the younger one was always "chosen" and the older one went off to establish another nation. This is the first time all the father's children continue to be the "Children of Israel"! Since one needs to be the leader, why not Joseph, son of beloved Rachel, and a dreamer like his dad?

But the brothers couldn't stand him, and therefore couldn't even imagine anything good in his words. It's not that they hated him because of what he said. They hated him. And their hatred shut off their ability to see and hear him.

As it is this year, Miketz, this week's reading, is often read during Hanukkah. Again, there is darkness. Again, we have an opportunity to add a small light, to make a conscious decision to see.

Shabbat Shalom, Chodesh Tov & Hanukkah Same'ach.



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