

Like Father Like Son

The Midrash explains that “Eileh Toldot Yaakov- Yosef” hints at and emphasizes the similarities between father and son. Both Yaakov and Yosef were born circumcised. Both were born from mothers who were barren for a long time. Both Yaakov and Yosef died in Egypt, their bodies were embalmed and brought to their final resting place in Eretz Yisrael.

While the Midrash focuses on external, coincidental similarities, Rabbi Moshe Amiel notes similarities related to the behaviors and personalities of Yaakov and Yosef. Yaakov and Yosef are unique among the Avot in that **they both dream and they both cry.**

They both dream: We are not told that Avraham or Yitzchak dreamed dreams. The first patriarch in the Torah to dream is Yaakov. “And he dreamed, and behold! A ladder set up on the ground and its top reached to heaven.” Yosef takes after his father in this regard. Not only does the Torah describe two of Yosef’s dreams, but Yosef is familiar enough with the subject that he is a capable interpreter of dreams for others.

Dreaming is often a creative endeavor. We often dream about things that can’t be found in our reality. Yet our dreams may point to a certain potential that exists. It’s not surprising that both Yaakov and Yosef are dreamers, considering that both Yaakov and Yosef had the potential to be the bechor, the firstborn (or were the firstborn on some level). The Talmud in Baba Batra 123 notes:

Re’uya Hayta Bechora L’tzeit Mi’Rachel. If things went according to plan and Rachel got married first, then Yosef would’ve been the firstborn. Similarly Rashi in Parah Toldot quotes a Midrashic tradition that Yaakov was conceived first and therefore can be considered the firstborn on some level. Both Yosef and Yaakov could be considered firstborns on a level of reality beyond what we see with our eyes. Dreaming is at times about seeing an alternate reality. It is therefore not surprising that Yaakov and Yosef who were both dreamers have a “firstborn persona” based on an alternate reality.

Second, Yaakov and Yosef both cry, something we don’t find by Avraham or Yitzchak. The one place where the Torah says that Avraham cried was an expression of honor for his wife Sarah- and even there the Torah writes the word cry with a small *chaf*, as if to teach that crying is not typically a part of Avraham’s character.

Yosef cries a number of times in the Torah, especially when he is reunited with his brothers; both before they know that he is Yosef and then after the reunion is complete. While Yosef cries a number of times, his brothers never do. At most they are sad, but they never shed even one tear.

In this way Yosef takes after his father Yaakov.

Vayishak Yaakov L’Rachel, Vayisa et Kolo- Vayevk. Like Father- Like Son.

Dreaming and crying are both expressions of sensitivity. Crying and Dreaming originate from our emotions, not our intellect.

Yaakov cries. Just like Yosef cries. Yosef Dreams just as Yaakov Dreams. Eileh Toldot Yaakov- Yosef.

A recipe for a fulfilling and meaningful life is to emulate Yaakov and Yosef in these two ways: First, to be vulnerable and self-aware, and to embrace the full spectrum of emotions- even when it will bring us to cry.

Second, to be bold enough to dream- about different realities and about changing ourselves and the world around us for the better. Let us emulate the righteous qualities of Yaakov and Yosef- to keep crying and to keep dreaming. And if we have not yet done so, now’s a great time to start crying and to start dreaming.